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A CHAPTER OF MISFORTUNES

MAJOR-GENERAL W. D. BIRD
C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

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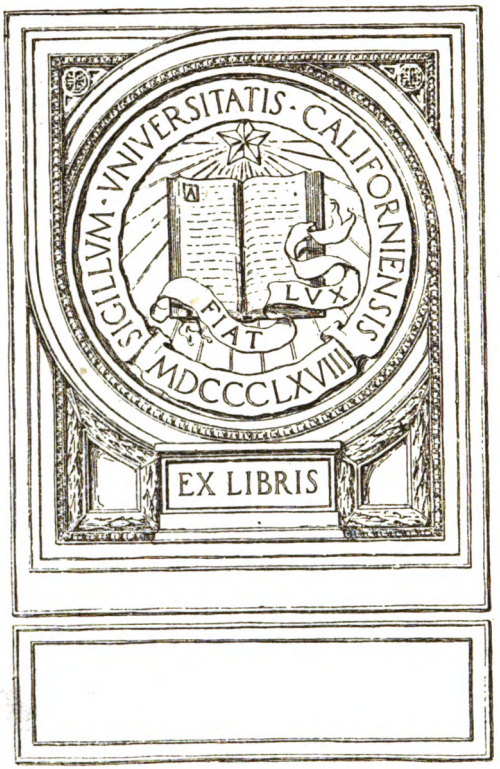

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THE BATTLES OF CTESIPHON AND OF THE DUJAILAH IN MESOPOTAMIA, WITH A SUMMARY OF THE EVENTS WHICH PRECEDED THEM

BY
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PREFACE

THIS narrative has largely been compiled from the original war diaries and other documents, to which I was most kindly allowed to have access. Among these was included, so far as the battle of Ctesiphon and the action at Umm-al-Tumal are concerned, a translation of *A Page from my Memories of the Irak Front in the World War*, by Staff Bimbashi Muhammad Amin, of the Turkish Army, published, as number 3 of a "Collection of Issues of War Histories of the General Staff," by the Military Press, Constantinople.

In addition I had the advantage of consulting the following books: *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, Major-General Sir Charles Townshend; *In Kut and Captivity*, Major E. W. C. Sandes; *Mesopotamia*, 1914–1915, Captain H. Birch-Reynardson; *The Long Road to Baghdad*, Edmund Candler; *The Chronicle of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry*; and the Report of the Mesopotamia Commission.

Information, for which I am most grateful, was also obtained from officers who took part in this campaign, in regard to the battle of Ctesiphon and other matters. (The war diaries having reference to this battle and to the subsequent retreat to Kut-al-Amarah were, for the most part, destroyed at the fall of this place.)

The maps are based on the Ordnance maps and on the sketch-maps which were in use in Force D.

A table is given in Appendix I of the principal events that occurred during this period in other British theatres of war, and in the Caucasus area of operations.

W. D. B.

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CONTENTS

PAGE

CHAPTER I

EVENTS PRIOR TO THE BATTLE OF CTESIPHON . 1

CHAPTER II

THE BATTLE OF CTESIPHON 38

CHAPTER III

EVENTS SUBSEQUENT TO THE BATTLE OF CTESIPHON 90

CHAPTER IV

EVENTS PRECEDING THE BATTLE OF THE DUJAILAH REDOUBT 142

CHAPTER V

THE BATTLE OF THE DUJAILAH REDOUBT . . 193

APPENDIX I

PRINCIPAL EVENTS IN OTHER BRITISH THEATRES OF WAR AND IN ASIA MINOR, 1914–1916 . . 257

APPENDICES II–V

THE DISTRIBUTION OF FORCE IN MESOPOTAMIA TOWARDS THE END OF OCTOBER AND ABOUT MIDDLE OF DECEMBER 1915, AND THE END OF JANUARY AND END OF FEBRUARY 1916 . 259–275

Digitized by Google

PAGE

APPENDIX VI

MEMORANDUM ISSUED ON THE 3RD MARCH, 1916, IN REGARD TO THE FORMATIONS TO BE ADOPTED DURING AN ADVANCE BY NIGHT . . . 276

INDEX 278

FACING PAGE

MAP I

GENERAL, AND THE BATTLEFIELD OF CTESIPHON . 240

MAP II

THE VICINITY OF KUT-AL-AMARAH, AND THE BATTLEFIELDS OF SHAIKH SAAD, WADI, AND HANNAH . 248

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A CHAPTER OF MISFORTUNES

CHAPTER I

EVENTS PRIOR TO THE BATTLE OF CTESIPHON

THERE are few British campaigns which disclose such variations of fortune as those which took place in Mesopotamia in the years 1914 to 1916. In fewer still has the change taken place so suddenly as to plunge an army from the pinnacle of success into such a chapter of misfortunes as those which occurred after the battle of Ctesiphon.

The earlier events which preceded this action are so well known that only the briefest description of them will be necessary.

The advanced guard of the small force of one division, under Lieutenant-General Sir A. A. Barrett, with which the British undertook the invasion of Mesopotamia, landed in the delta of the Tigris and Euphrates early in November 1914. After a sharp action with the Turks and Arabs at Sahil on the 17th of the month, Basrah was occupied, and, for purposes of security, Barrett then first extended his frontage to Kurnah on his right and Shaibah on his left, and later on also occupied Ahwaz on the Karun. (See Map 1.)

General Barrett subsequently received certain reinforcements; but the Turks, who had also despatched troops to this theatre, were able, in April 1915, to make a strong effort to evict the British, who, in the meanwhile, had remained strategically on the defensive. Shortly after the arrival of additional reinforcements under Lieutenant-General Sir John Nixon, who took over command of Force D, as it was then termed, the enemy were, however, decisively beaten

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at Shaibah, in a battle which lasted from the 12th to the 14th April.

Sir John Nixon then assumed the offensive, and a force under Major-General G. F. Gorringe quickly cleared the enemy from the lower valley of the Karun. Major-General C. V. F. Townshend, commanding the 6th Division, next gained a brilliant victory on the 31st May over a Turkish force at Kurnah; and following up his success with a most daring pursuit, undertaken with a few naval gunboats and armed yachts and tugs that were co-operating with the army, he not only captured Amarah but also a large number of prisoners and a quantity of material. Major-General Gorringe then advanced up the Euphrates and took Nasiriyah at the end of July, after a series of operations which were carried out in face both of obstinate resistance, and under such meteorological conditions as prevail at the height of the hot weather in one of the most trying climates in the world. On the 28th September General Townshend moved up the swift-flowing Tigris with a force of the 6th Division and other troops amounting to about 11,000 combatants with 32 guns, besides those with the Naval Flotilla. He then again soundly beat the Turkish army, consisting of about 10,000 men of the 35th, 38th, and part of another division, near Kut-al-Amarah. But owing to a sudden fall after the battle in the level of the river, which at this season is at its lowest level with a depth of about 4 feet, close pursuit by water became impossible. The Turks, therefore, were able to occupy a position which had been prepared by them at Ctesiphon, and General Townshend halted and entrenched his advanced troops at Aziziyah, while the question of undertaking a further advance, for the purpose of gaining Baghdad, was considered by the Governments both at Home and in India.

On the 30th August, one month before the battle of Kut-al-Amarah, Sir John Nixon had, under instructions which he had received on proceeding to Mesopotamia, forwarded to India a memorandum on the possibility of occupying this

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city. The memorandum commenced with a statement in regard to the strategical importance of Baghdad, which, in Sir John's opinion, would, while in the hands of the Turks, cover and protect the only practicable lines of approach to Irak from Syria and Asia Minor along the Euphrates and Tigris. Baghdad, it was also pointed out, was one of the few military arsenals in the Turkish Empire, Damascus and Aleppo being the nearest of the others; it was used by the enemy as a centre for the organisation, equipment, and training of troops, and its capture would not only involve the Turks in the loss of these advantages, but stores and supplies must be abandoned and must in future be obtained from great distances. The fall of Baghdad would seriously shake the prestige of the Turks in Asia and would correspondingly raise that of the British, and from Baghdad the latter would control the principal lines of communication from Mesopotamia into Persia via Khanikin, which would be advantageous in enabling hostile activity and propaganda among the Persians to be checked. This, continued Sir John, did not, however, complete the category of the advantages that would be obtained by the occupation of the city, which was an excellent centre for the control both of the Arabs and irrigation channels, whilst by its possession we should also gain in the commercial sense.

From the purely military standpoint the outlook, in Sir John Nixon's judgment, was equally advantageous. The fighting strength of the enemy's forces in Irak was estimated at not more than 10,200 men, of whom 2,000, who were half trained and inadequately equipped, were in Baghdad. For months there had been constant rumours as to the movement of large reinforcements of Turkish troops to Mesopotamia, but, in fact, besides drafts, only a couple of battalions and three heavy and twelve field guns had been sent there. Moreover, the despatch of larger numbers was only to be anticipated in the event of units being withdrawn either from Gallipoli or from the Caucasus. Even so it was calculated that the troops could not be brought into action near

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Baghdad until two months after leaving Aleppo, and at least one month's notice would probably be received of their approach. Further, as supplies and munitions must be drawn from distant points, the Turks would experience great difficulty in maintaining in the Jazirah a force sufficiently large to recapture Baghdad after its occupation by the British.

Sir John Nixon next proceeded to consider the conditions under which Baghdad could most advantageously be taken, and arrived at the conclusion that these would be most favourable were Baghdad to fall as the culmination of a vigorous pursuit after victory. And, in these circumstances, one division would suffice for its capture. A force of one division, however, would, in Sir John's opinion, not be adequate to hold a city of 145,000 inhabitants against a serious attempt to retake it. The defending troops must have room to manœuvre, the Baghdad vilayat—which extends, it may be noted, northwards beyond a line drawn from the Persian frontier near Khanikin and then through Takrit and Anah—must be controlled, troops must be thrust forward for these purposes, and there must be a garrison for the city of Baghdad and a striking force ready for use as required. Nevertheless these, and all other obligations incidental to the occupation of Irak, could be undertaken with the troops at Nixon's disposal, in addition to a reinforcement of two infantry brigades and of such other units as would set the cavalry and horse artillery free from garrison duties in the valley of the Karun.

The General Staff in India expressed themselves as being in general agreement with the views put forward by Sir John Nixon, and these, after all, dealt only with matters in regard to which a valid opinion could be given without local knowledge or experience. But it was thought that one infantry brigade would be required to control the area from Falujah to Baghdad and for garrison duties in the city; four infantry brigades and one cavalry brigade would constitute an effective striking force, and one division and

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one cavalry brigade would be equal to the task of holding Nasiriyah, Ahwaz, and the lines of communication. On the other hand, General Sir Beauchamp Duff, the Commander-in-Chief in India, made an annotation on the paper containing the views of the General Staff that: "Unless [1] we can get back troops [previously sent from India] from France, Egypt, and elsewhere, I fear that Baghdad, invaluable as its capture would be, is out of the question." Nevertheless a few days later the General Staff again ventured the opinion that, in the event of victory, Sir John Nixon should be authorised to push on to Baghdad; provided that one division and one cavalry brigade could be made available as a reinforcement of the troops in Mesopotamia, and that the division could be despatched so as to reach the country within one month of the occupation of the city.

It is not difficult to be wise after the event, and it is now evident that in this review of the situation Sir John Nixon carried to the extreme the maxim that in war a commander should regard the advantages that may be gained rather than the obstacles that must be overcome, and should consider the enemy's difficulties rather than his own. Perhaps, also, he allowed the advantages of the end to blind him to the absence of means, especially as regards transportation, for its attainment.

It may, in addition, be pointed out that Sir John Nixon's paper was in reality founded on the assumptions that the allied operations on the Gallipoli peninsula [2] and in the Caucasus theatre of war would continue to hold fast at least as many Turkish troops as was being done when it was written; and that the difficulties of maintaining the large forces that would be necessary for the reconquest of Baghdad would be insurmountable. The first depended, however, on eventualities of which Sir John was not master; and if the British were successful in taking Constantinople the numbers that would be contained by them in this area would be larger than before, Turkish prestige would fall to the

[1] Report of Mesopotamia Commission. [2] See Appendix I.

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ground, Baghdad could easily be captured, and all the foundations on which the enemy could base propaganda in Asia would crumble. But if the Allies failed at Gallipoli, the number of Turkish troops that would be held fast in Europe would probably be much smaller, the reputation of the Turks would be increased and that of the British lowered, which would affect the attitude of the Arabs and add, therefore, to the military difficulties of Force D. A serious check, moreover, had recently been experienced by the British at Suvla bay, of which Sir John must have been aware. Winter also was approaching, when at best the allied operations both on Gallipoli and in the Caucasus area would slacken, and Turkish troops would probably then be available to restore the enemy's position in Mesopotamia. The difficulty of keeping in food and ammunition a force sufficient to undertake the recapture of Baghdad with some probability of success was plainly not inconsiderable; but if the Turks did despatch a large army from Europe and Asia Minor for this purpose, and if they succeeded, further, in rousing the Arabs on our long and vulnerable line of communication, the position of the British would be serious. A month's warning was hardly sufficient to allow of adequate reinforcements reaching Mesopotamia in time to meet such a threat; while if the troops landed in the country in time to oppose the enemy, some of them would be absorbed in securing the lines of communication, and the rest could apparently not have been sent to the front and supplied with munitions and such stores as could not be obtained locally, with the limited fleet of river transport at Sir John Nixon's disposal. (See end of Appendix II.)

The success or failure of audacious strokes such as that which was contemplated by Sir John Nixon is, in fact, generally relative to whether reinforcements can be furnished to the attacking force before the defenders have recovered from their surprise, and mustered troops adequate for the delivery of a counter-attack. This is illustrated by the success of Townshend's thrust on Amarah in June 1915,

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and by the failure of the operations of the British against Buenos Ayres in 1807 and the events that occurred in Afghanistan in the years 1839–1841.

Some days before the battle of Kut-al-Amarah Sir John Nixon had announced to Townshend his intention of being present at the battle, but the telegram added: "He does not intend to interfere with your arrangements, but in case questions of general policy have to be settled as a result of the action, he wishes to be on the spot."

Even as early as November 1914, after the capture of Basrah, suggestions had been made that the British should forthwith advance to Baghdad; but these, and also later proposals of the same kind, had been negatived by the British Government, who had laid down that in Mesopotamia "a safe game must be played." An advance as far as Kut-al-Amarah had, however, been sanctioned on the ground that, after the capture of Nasiriyah, the occupation of the former was a "strategic necessity." At the time when this decision was made it was perhaps overlooked that, since Kut-al-Amarah is only about 100 miles from Baghdad, pursuit after victory could hardly fail to carry the British within striking distance of the latter; and if so, it would be difficult to resist the arguments in favour of continuing the offensive. It is not improbable that Nixon subsequently foresaw what was likely to occur, and the words "general policy," which have been quoted above, seem to refer to this contingency.

While the pursuing troops, the weak Cavalry Brigade, and the 18th Infantry Brigade, and one battery of the 6th Division,[1] were slowly moving after the enemy by land and river from Kut-al-Amarah, Sir John Nixon had remained at this place; and he then sent a telegram to India, which was repeated to General Townshend, reviewing the situation as he saw it. The Turks, he said, were retiring in two

[1] The other brigades and bulk of the artillery had remained at and near Kut-al-Amarah.

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columns, comprising about 4,000 infantry, six squadrons of cavalry, 300 camelmen, and 20 guns ; one column was being harassed by the Arab tribesmen, and the enemy had lost much of their ammunition. With the exception of a body of about 1,500 infantry, with a couple of guns, which had been in the valley of the Euphrates at Kafl, there were apparently no enemy reinforcements at hand. Those troops of the 6th Division that were not following the Turks were concentrating at Kut-al-Amarah, two battalions of the 30th Infantry Brigade from the line of communication would shortly reach this place, and in a week a reinforcement of one horse artillery battery and one regiment of cavalry would be available from the Karun area. Two courses, observed Sir John, could be followed by the British, who could either break off the pursuit or continue their thrust forward. Should the enemy make a stand in the position that had been prepared at Ctesiphon, the pursuing column and the airmen could reconnoitre it while the remainder moved to their support. Owing to the necessity of evacuating the wounded, this movement would, however, occupy some days. Nixon added that it was proposed to continue to press the Turks, that he was in touch by wireless with Townshend, and that the pursuit, even though slow, could not fail to demoralise the enemy and at the same time produce a favourable effect politically.

On the 3rd October Sir John sent another telegram to India, which was repeated to Mr. Austen Chamberlain, the Secretary of State, India Office, reporting that, as the enemy had occupied the position at Ctesiphon, the opportunity of effecting a surprise and stampede had passed. It was now noted that, in addition to the troops that had fought at Kut-al-Amarah, there were at Ctesiphon four battalions with four guns which had come down from Mosul, and three battalions, also with four guns, that had been in the valley of the Euphrates. Nevertheless, Nixon added, that with the intention of opening the road to Baghdad,[1] for which

[1] Report of Mesopotamia Commission.

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the troops at his disposal were sufficient, he proposed to concentrate his striking force at Aziziyah, moving the forces partly by land.

Meanwhile Townshend had forwarded certain comments, on the 3rd October, on Sir John Nixon's first estimate of the situation, in a telegram addressed to the Major-General General Staff of the force. In this [1] it was observed that, according to the reports of the airmen, the Turks had now occupied the position which had previously been prepared at Ctesiphon; that, in his opinion, our object up to the battle of Kut-al-Amarah had been the occupation of the strategical position at that place, and the consolidation of our hold on the vilayat of Basrah. Should it be considered by the Government to be inadvisable from a political point of view to occupy Baghdad on account of the doubtful situation at the Dardanelles, and the possibility that our small force would be subsequently evicted from Baghdad by troops withdrawn from Anatolia, then, on military grounds, Townshend believed that we should consolidate our position at Kut-al-Amarah. If, on the other hand, it was the desire of the Government to occupy Baghdad, then, unless great risks were to be run, it was, in his opinion, absolutely necessary that the advance by road from Kut-al-Amarah should be carried out methodically by two divisions, or by one division supported closely by another division. This force would be required in addition to the troops necessary for garrison duty at such places as Nasiriyah Ahwaz, and Amarah.

This plain-spoken statement, which did in fact controvert the views held by the Commander-in-Chief, was not regarded with much favour at General Headquarters, and later, on the 3rd, a crushing answer [1] was received from Major-General G. V. Kemball, the senior officer of the General Staff, to the effect that, in demanding two divisions, Townshend did not appear to have taken into account Sir John Nixon's estimate that the Turks could now dispose only of

[1] *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, Major-General Sir C. Townshend.

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4,000 infantry, 500 horsemen, and 20 guns. These troops, it was pointed out, were inferior in numbers and *moral* to the force which had just been driven out of a stronger position than that at Ctesiphon. It was added that the Army Commander's intention was to open the way to Baghdad, as he understood that another division would be sent from France. Townshend, therefore, was to submit a plan of operations for effecting this object, and would soon be reinforced by four squadrons and a battery of horse artillery. This plan was forwarded to General Headquarters on the next day.

This correspondence throws an interesting light on the mental attitude of the two commanders. General Townshend had just experienced the anxieties incidental on his personal responsibility during a critical battle; the ample proposition that hope makes had failed to materialise, for the Turks, although defeated, had not been routed, as at Kurnah; it seems that he suspected that some of his troops were shaken and not in the mood willingly to face fresh exertions and dangers, and a natural revulsion of feeling had followed. Nixon, on the other hand, was still apparently under the influence of the opinions expressed in his memorandum of the 30th August, and desired to take advantage of the situation of the enemy to effect the capture of Baghdad, from which so much was expected. Emotion of every kind tends, it is said, to disturb the intellectual balance; and when the mind is exalted or depressed above or below its normal, there is a disposition to form false estimates both as to the probable results of actions and as to the relative importance of factors. It is not unlikely that Sir John Nixon, whose feelings were stimulated by success, was justly confident that the ability of General Townshend and the fighting power of his troops would gain another victory, if the Turks could be brought to battle. But whether the small force of perhaps 8,000 or 9,000 fighting men would have maintained its position after reaching Baghdad until the arrival of reinforcements from the West

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is, as has been pointed out, another matter; and, like so many other questions of strategy, the issue would in the main have been decided by whether the Turks or British could most quickly succeed in transporting troops to the Mesopotamian front.

On the 4th October, and perhaps in consequence of Townshend's representations, Sir John Nixon addressed a telegram [1] to India with reference to the suggestion as to the opening of the road to Baghdad by another general action, and enquired whether the troops in Mesopotamia were to be reinforced by a division [2] from France in order that the position at Baghdad might be maintained. It was further pointed out that the effect of occupying Baghdad would be made nugatory if its evacuation became subsequently necessary; and a somewhat anxious question was asked as to whether the Russians had advanced sufficiently far to enable the route from Asia Minor to the upper Tigris to be menaced by their forces.

The General Staff at Simla, who estimated that the British could be opposed by 8,000 infantry (when those who were now stragglers had rejoined), 6 squadrons, 500 camelmen, and 28 guns, in a position that had only in part been entrenched, now added the weight of their opinion in favour of an advance to Baghdad before the enemy had time to strengthen their lines at Ctesiphon. If reinforcements could not be sent from France to Mesopotamia, it was further suggested that the authorities in India might be able to scrape together one weak cavalry brigade, two infantry brigades, and a brigade of Territorial field artillery for despatch to Sir John Nixon.

The question as to whether an advance was to be made to Baghdad had, as stated above, however, now become one of such high strategy as to engage the close attention of the Cabinet in London.

At the period when the British entered Mesopotamia there

[1] Report of Mesopotamia Commission.
[2] Two divisions were sent from India to France in 1914.

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seems to have been little or no difference of opinion that the operations in France were the main object of Britain's attention, and the invasion of Mesopotamia, together with the campaigns in East and West Africa and the measures for the security of Egypt, fell, therefore, naturally into their places as buttresses of the greater structure. The history of the higher direction of almost every war that is prolonged is, however, also that of an intense struggle between those who desire to pursue the principle of concentration at the decisive point and the powerful interests that make for the dissipation of force ; and it is not too much to say that success or failure has usually depended on the maintenance of a just balance between these conflicting requirements.

This tendency was soon exemplified in the Great War, and early in 1915 the British began to halt between two opinions as to the decisive theatre. Eloquent voices pointed to the remarkable deadlock that had supervened in France, and means of escaping from the labyrinth of trench fighting began to be canvassed. As a result an expedition was launched against the Dardanelles, but here a serious dilemma had now again supervened, and it seemed likely that the British would be faced with disaster whether they evacuated the Gallipoli peninsula or endeavoured to maintain their precarious footing on its shores.

Meanwhile, as has been narrated, the British had continued their operations in Mesopotamia for the expressed purpose of protecting the oilfields on the Karun river, of checkmating Turkish intrigue, of demonstrating to the Asiatic world their ability to strike a blow in Asia, and of bringing the Arab inhabitants of Mesopotamia in on our side. As time went on it was believed that these objectives could best be attained by the effective occupation of the Basrah vilayat, which extends from just beyond Nasiriyah almost to Kut-al-Amarah, although this might and did in the end involve a change from a defensive to an offensive strategy locally. But now that this tract had been occupied so far as the riparian area of the great rivers was concerned,

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the lure of the offensive pointed to a further advance for purposes of security; since instinct and experience both prove that an invader is generally secure while he continues to advance, and much also was expected from the occupation of Baghdad. General Townshend's victory on the 28th September had, in addition, come most opportunely as a gleam of light in a period of reverse and depression in other theatres of war; and the thoughts of statesmen not unnaturally turned to the possibility of counteracting the effect of what might occur at Gallipoli by the prestige attaching to the capture of this important city.

The moment, then, was in many ways critical, for if it were still ruled that France was the decisive theatre, it would follow that, at any rate in localities such as Mesopotamia, where the offensive might have led to an expenditure of force that would have been prejudicial to the main operations, a defensive strategy should have been pursued. Further, the troops in a theatre like that of Mesopotamia should, in principle, have so manœuvred as to oblige the enemy to use a larger proportion of his troops and resources than that which was being employed in them by the British. And this probably could best be effected by making the enemy come to meet the British rather than by a more extensive invasion of their territory.

At first the authorities were inclined to blow cold on Nixon's enthusiasm, for, on the 4th October, the Secretary of State for India telegraphed to the Viceroy (Lord Hardinge of Penshurst) that if, owing to difficulties in navigating the Tigris, there was no probability of overtaking the enemy, there seemed to be no object in continuing the pursuit. The instructions that had formerly been issued were to hold good otherwise, namely, that in Mesopotamia a safe game was to be played, and that any proposals involving demands for reinforcements were to be deprecated. On the same day another telegram was received referring to a letter which had been sent by the Viceroy on the 10th September; and it seems that in this a policy had been outlined

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which rendered it imperative to stop a further advance by the force under Sir John Nixon. The Viceroy was asked, therefore, again to communicate his views to the Secretary of State. Lord Hardinge replied to this request by quoting General Nixon's telegram of the 4th October in regard to the despatch of a division to Mesopotamia. It was also remarked that additional troops for Mesopotamia could not be spared from India, so that, unless one of the two Indian Army divisions then serving in France could be sent to Sir John Nixon, a concentration of his striking force as far forward as Aziziyah would be useless. The opinion of the Commander-in-Chief in India was quoted, in addition, to the effect that an advance should not be made in strength beyond Kut-al-Amarah, unless it were certain that reinforcements from France could be sent to Mesopotamia.

The first of these telegrams was repeated to Sir John Nixon, who, on finding that his project of advancing on Baghdad had fallen into some disfavour, sent a long message to India on the 6th October, repeating it to the Secretary of State. In this it was stated [1] that: "By marching the troops with land transport and by lightening the vessels and employing them to tow two loaded barges, we have overcome the difficulties of navigation. This morning the headquarters of the Cavalry Brigade with 100 lances and three guns of S Battery (horse artillery) left by road for Aziziyah, followed by all the field artillery and the 16th Brigade (of the 6th Division). Orders to reach Aziziyah by the evening of the 7th October have been given to the cavalry. It seems that the Ctesiphon position has been taken up by the enemy, who are not continuing their retreat, and thus a threat against us exists. The defeat of the enemy at Kut-al-Amarah, a position which was thought to be impregnable, has, according to our information, much demoralised his troops, more especially those recruited locally. Nur-ud-Din (the Turkish Commander-in-Chief) will now find it difficult, with men who are anxious to desert

[1] Quoted in part in the Report of the Mesopotamia Commission.

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and are near their homes, to make a resolute defence in a position near Baghdad. It is therefore my opinion that, as soon as the 6th Division, reinforced by cavalry and drafts which are now coming from Basrah, is all concentrated at Aziziyah, it will in all probability be possible to overtake and decisively defeat the enemy at Ctesiphon. On the other hand, all the tribes and the hostile army would give their own interpretation to any such movement as a withdrawal on our part from Aziziyah to Kut-al-Amarah. They would then probably again advance towards Kut-al-Amarah, as was done last July towards Amarah, when, in order that General Gorringe might be strengthened in the direction of Nasiriyah, the troops were taken from the post above Amarah. On that occasion, until the victory at Kut-al-Amarah again established British ascendancy, a constant source of trouble was found in a powerful section of the tribesmen who had before this announced their submission to us, but had later joined the enemy again. From all sides the Arab tribes, who now look on us as irresistible, have been coming in to submit to us; they will, however, probably again act as they did before should we retire. The view I take is that before us lies an enemy who has been shaken, who is short of ammunition and has lost thirteen guns, and while we have the chance it is obviously profitable for military reasons to overwhelm him. I hope I can destroy him, as the position in which he has taken refuge is one where we are able to manœuvre. Should we let such an opportunity slip by us, I can see no argument by which we could justify ourselves. Baghdad is, in its military aspect, a large centre of supply and a focus of hostile lines of advance, and without regarding the possible political effect of its occupation by us, it is, in our interests, essential to deprive the enemy of its possession."

This telegram may not unfairly be termed a plea that the situation that will result from a particular policy must be more favourable than the present and past. But, it may be pointed out, while the evils of the present and past have

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been proved by experience, those of the future can only be surmised, or if a sanguine view is taken can be disregarded. Sir John foresaw halcyon days after the fall of Baghdad, but there seems no valid reason why he should not, had he entered the city, have found himself face to face with a similar and probably in some respects more serious problem than that existing; for he would have had to take measures not only to control a great town, but also a longer line of communications, and perhaps, in addition, oppose a hostile force operating from Falujah and Samarrah.

Meanwhile, on the 5th October, the Secretary of State had informed [1] the Viceroy that the Cabinet had come to the decision to appoint a committee composed of representatives of the Foreign Office, India Office, Admiralty, and General Staff to consider, in all its possibilities, the policy of advancing on Baghdad. If the forces that were available would be sufficient to capture and hold the place, it was thought that political reasons would make its occupation desirable, as the German agents who were in Persia would be isolated. A note of warning was, however, sounded, for the opinion of General Sir E. Barrow, the Military Secretary of the India Office, was quoted that the troops in Mesopotamia, if weakened by further losses, would be insufficient both to hold Baghdad securely and to maintain the British lines of communication. There was, moreover, it was added, no hope of obtaining reinforcements from Europe or Egypt.

This telegram was either answered or crossed by a "private" message sent on the 6th by the Viceroy. In this [1] it was stated that Nixon could without difficulty capture Baghdad with the forces at his disposal, and at the same time take or destroy [2] the Turkish steamers and other boats, thus practically preventing any further attacks downstream. But unless he were reinforced by one division he could not stay in Baghdad, and to advance and then retire

[1] Report of Mesopotamia Commission.

[2] The Tigris is not generally navigable by steamers above Baghdad

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would be a grave error. Nixon must, therefore, remain at Kut-al-Amarah, unless it were possible to send reinforcements to him from some area other than India. On the 6th the Viceroy again telegraphed to London stating that the views of Sir John Nixon in regard to the opening of the road to Baghdad were endorsed, and that the present moment seemed favourable for the transfer of the Indian troops from France. Having regard to the actions of the Germans in Persia, to the conditions obtaining in the Balkans, where Bulgaria was on the eve of making war on the Western Powers and the Central Powers were about to invade Serbia, to the situation at the Dardanelles and to the increasing pressure that was being brought to bear by our enemies on the Afghans, it was maintained that the capture of Baghdad would produce such an effect in the Near East and offered such strategical and political advantages as to justify the undertaking. It was added, however, that an additional division was required, and if this could not be provided, Nixon would not be allowed to advance beyond Kut-al-Amarah. On the next day the Viceroy sent a further message [1] to the authorities at home to the effect that the Commander-in-Chief in India agreed that it would be unwise to occupy Baghdad with the forces that were then in Mesopotamia. And on the 7th Sir Beauchamp Duff also telegraphed to Sir John Nixon that the question of an advance on Baghdad was under consideration by the Cabinet, that reinforcements from Europe and Egypt could not be made available, and that in the circumstances Nixon should, as far as possible, refrain from committing his force until the Cabinet had come to a decision.

On the 8th October, however, the Secretary of State telegraphed to the Viceroy [1] that the Cabinet were so much impressed with the great political and military advantages that would accrue from the occupation of Baghdad that every effort would be made to provide the force necessary for this purpose. In conclusion he remarked that, "We

[1] Report of Mesopotamia Commission.

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do not wish to attempt it with insufficient forces. Will one division suffice ? " On the same day a very urgent official telegram was sent from the India Office both to the Government of India and Sir John Nixon, in the following terms : " To [1] both occupy and hold Baghdad, what addition to your present forces are you confident will be necessary ? " Sir John at once replied in a telegram addressed both to the Secretary of State and to the Chief of the General Staff, Simla [2] : " No additions are necessary to my present force to beat Nur-ud-Din and occupy Baghdad ; of this I am confident. But if the recovery of Baghdad should seriously engage the attention of the Turks, and if the large organised force necessary for this purpose should be sent to Mesopotamia, then, in addition to my present force, one division and one cavalry regiment would be needed to watch the lines of approach along the Tigris and Euphrates and inflict defeat on the enemy should he approach within striking distance. Moreover, for this purpose the Baghdad position is best. By road Aziziyah is 48 miles and Kut-al-Amarah 103 miles from Baghdad."

The Viceroy also replied [3] that he was glad of the decision of the Cabinet. Sir Beauchamp Duff had, he said, been consulted, and considered that Sir John Nixon was in the best position to estimate the number of additional troops that would be required to hold Baghdad and Irak—namely, a division and a cavalry regiment, both at full war establishment. This opinion, said the Viceroy, was therefore accepted, but it would also be necessary to ensure that the British units now in Mesopotamia were maintained at their authorised establishment by drafts from home ; the Indian units would be fully maintained from India. It was stated, further, that : " We may add that the reinforcing troops should reach Baghdad not later than one month after the capture of that city, and this is the period which we calculate

[1] Report of Mesopotamia Commission.
[2] First portion quoted in Report of Mesopotamia Commission.
[3] Report of Mesopotamia Commission.

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must elapse before the Turks could concentrate in strength to attempt its recapture."

On receipt of the confident message from Nixon, the Secretary of State telegraphed "privately" to the Viceroy that it was hoped in a few days to give definite information as to the possibility of furnishing reinforcements for the force in Mesopotamia. Meanwhile Nixon should be instructed to maintain his present position and should be prepared to advance if the necessary reinforcements could be sent to him.

On the 9th October Sir John Nixon sent an answer to the "personal" telegram of the 7th from Sir Beauchamp Duff. In this he said that since the attitude of the enemy "is as it is"—the Turks, it may be pointed out, had been pushing troops forward to Zeur—the British must be in strength in front. The last of Townshend's three brigades would, however, halt at Shidhaif on its way up the Tigris, where it would be within supporting distance of the remainder, and would also be well placed to cover a withdrawal and to stop raiding against the line of communications above Kut-al-Amarah. Nixon still held fast to his opinion as to the desirability of taking Baghdad and observed that: "In the event of the Turks sending large forces against us in course of time, and whether we get reinforcements or not, we are within fifty miles of Baghdad, and Baghdad rather than below it is our most favourable position to hold what we have won." He ended, however, with the assurance that: "I am not committing myself unless forced by enemy action to take steps."

It seems that Sir John had now become somewhat anxious as to the situation of his force in regard to river transport, and on the 9th he also telegraphed as to the urgent need for light draught vessels, the lack of which was very seriously impeding operations. A few days later Nixon stated that tugs of three feet six inches draft and sternwheelers of two feet six inches draft would be useful as a stop-gap if they could be sent to Mesopotamia soon. He also asked that

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everything possible should be done to assist him to meet the urgent difficulties that would be encountered until the water-level of the river began to rise again in February.

These representations were supported by the General Staff at Simla, who considered that every effort should be made to provide the force in Mesopotamia with the river transport that was required. A reply, therefore, was eventually sent to General Nixon to the effect that some of the shipping could be provided in India, and that the matter had been referred to the Secretary of State, India Office. On the 29th October, after the decision had been made that an advance against Baghdad was to be undertaken, the Viceroy also telegraphed to the Secretary of State that it was imperative to supply quickly the additional river transport required in view both of the present and prospective situations in Mesopotamia. All that could be done in India in this connection was being accomplished.

Meanwhile, on the 14th October, the Secretary of State telegraphed to the Viceroy to the effect that a question had arisen as to the adequacy of the reinforcements that had been mentioned by Sir John Nixon—viz. one division, one regiment of cavalry—and as to whether even with two additional divisions it would be possible to hold Baghdad after its capture. This point was still under consideration, and meanwhile information was required as to whether the chances of making a successful advance would be prejudiced by the delay in coming to a decision. The Viceroy replied next day [1] that, unless the Turks were strongly reinforced meanwhile, and of this there were no immediate signs, the chances of success would not be prejudiced by delay, but that heavier casualties would be suffered in attaining our purpose. This telegram did not give quite a correct picture of the situation, since it appears that General Townshend's requirements, as stated in his plan of operations which was submitted to Nixon on the 4th October, could not at the very earliest have been met before the end of

[1] Report of Mesopotamia Commission.

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this month, but this fact would not have been known in India.

On the 15th October the Secretary of State telegraphed [1] "privately" to the Viceroy that if the report of the General Staff proved to be in favour of the occupation of Baghdad, the War Office contemplated the transfer of two Indian divisions, the 3rd (Lahore) and 7th (Meerut) Divisions, from France to Egypt, with the intention of placing them at the disposal of the authorities in India for employment in Mesopotamia. "But they cannot guarantee date of departure owing to uncertainty of position in Near East and possible need of transport for other purposes. They do not consider it would be safe under the circumstances for Nixon to advance to Baghdad before these troops have actually started from Egypt, unless you can undertake to supply him temporarily with a division from India in the event of these reinforcements being unavoidably delayed. I request an early reply as to the possibility of your undertaking this liability."

The Viceroy took two days to answer this question, and, on the 17th, he telegraphed enquiring whether it was to be understood that even if two Indian divisions were sent to Egypt, the uncertainty of the position in the Near East might not merely delay but prevent their movement to Mesopotamia. The Viceroy then put the possibility out of court of sending tentatively a division from India by ending his telegram with the words [1]: "After consultation with the Commander-in-Chief, we agree that in no case could I undertake to supply from India, even temporarily, a further force of the strength of a division."

It seems that the Viceroy had now come to the conclusion that a fuller statement should be made to the authorities at Home of the point of view of those in India. On the 21st October, therefore, the Secretary of State was informed that the Government of India agreed as to the advantages, both political and strategical, that would be obtained

[1] Report of Mesopotamia Commission.

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through the capture and occupation of Baghdad. They, however, regarded the security of India as their first preoccupation, and in consequence were quite unable to despatch an additional force of the strength of a division from India to Mesopotamia. After consultation with the Commander-in-Chief they had formed the opinion that there were three alternative methods of dealing with the existing situation. Baghdad could be taken and occupied—an undertaking which would present no difficulty whatever provided that it could be guaranteed that a division complete in all respects could reach Mesopotamia within two months from the date of the telegram. This would be the most satisfactory solution. The second alternative was to attack the enemy, raid Baghdad, capture the stores of the Turks and their few (half a dozen) remaining steamers, release the British captives, destroy the railway leading to Samarrah, and finally dominate the city by means of Naval patrols based on a camp situated to the south of it. This, however, possessed obvious disadvantages, both political and military, and was not recommended. The third was to remain on the defensive at Kut-al-Amarah, but this would involve a show of weakness which would be recognised by both Turks and Arabs, and the resulting situation might in the end force us to advance. The Commander-in-Chief in India stressed the value of Baghdad and of controlling the railway to Samarrah, which would prevent a surprise, but recognised that, without additions to the force then available, the British might be driven from Baghdad and involved in a very difficult and dangerous retreat down the Tigris. The Viceroy was content to leave the question to the Government, but trusted that the decision would be in favour of occupying Baghdad.

This telegram is of unusual interest as again disclosing plainly the very powerful attraction possessed by the offensive, and the arguments that can always be advanced in its favour. The defensive also is dull as a policy, and although the want of the power of lively thinking is sometimes a useful quality, dullness is an attribute that is rarely

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in favour. It may be pointed out here that soon after the commencement of the campaign, and subsequent to the occupation of Basrah, eloquent testimony was borne to the strategic advantages that would be obtained by an advance to Kurnah and Nasiriyah, and then to Amarah. When these places had been seized it was discovered that, for excellent reasons, the occupation of Kut-al-Amarah was a strategic necessity. No doubt the situation in Gallipoli was not then precarious, but it had become so before Townshend's attack on the 28th September on the enemy's positions near Kut-al-Amarah at Es Sinn, and the effect that might in consequence be produced on the operations in Mesopotamia could not have been overlooked. Yet no sooner had the capture of Kut-al-Amarah been effected than the advantages that had been proposed withered like Dead Sea fruit, and, as has been shown, opinion stampeded in favour of a further advance, without perhaps sufficient regard for the factors of transportation which necessarily limit all strategical operations. It has been said that the military professional mind is of necessity an unimaginative mind. But it can hardly be suggested that the sometimes fatal power of imagination was not in the ascendant as regards operations in Mesopotamia, for almost everyone was so much absorbed in considering the advantages of gaining Baghdad, that the dangers and difficulties that must be encountered were somewhat too readily discounted.

On the 21st October the Secretary of State, India Office, had also sent a long "private" message to the Viceroy, as follows[1]: "Baghdad advance. Report of combined Staffs estimates that General Nixon has only some 9,000 Turkish troops and some irregulars to deal with for next two months; that Turkish forces may be somewhat increased by the end of the year, and they might conceivably reach a total of 60,000 by end of January, and even larger figures during 1916. They consider if reinforced by two Indian divisions from France he might, with assistance of river flotilla, face

[1] Report of Mesopotamia Commission.

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risk of attack by 60,000, but there would remain possibility of enemy receiving at later date further reinforcements. The Staffs hold, therefore, that, from a military point of view, it would be unwise to occupy Baghdad unless military authorities have power to withdraw troops at once without regard to political considerations if military exigencies make this necessary. The War Office would give the two Indian divisions, but could not under any circumstances spare further reinforcements, and are doubtful of their capacity even to supply drafts if wastage from casualties or sickness is severe. They think Baghdad can easily be taken and held for some time, but it might become untenable later as explained above. At present moment it seems the German attempt to break through to Constantinople will succeed, and our position and prospects in Gallipoli are most uncertain. . . . Arabs are wavering, and will probably join Turks, unless we can offer them great inducement. We are, therefore, in great need of striking success in the East. . . . It is suggested that we should occupy Baghdad, giving assurances to Arab leaders that we favour creation of Arab State independent of Turks. . . . Unless you consider possibility of eventual withdrawal is decisive against advance, all other considerations seem to us to render it desirable, and we are prepared to order it."

The Viceroy's reply, despatched on the 23rd, was as under[1]: "Your private telegram of the 21st instant, Baghdad advance. Your description of the situation in the Near East proves conclusively the necessity for action in the Middle East. We accept the calculation of the combined Staffs of possible strength of Turks that may with time be brought against us; but with reinforcement of two Indian divisions from France we believe that Sir J. Nixon has a fair prospect of being able to hold his own against 60,000 or 70,000 Turks, provided he occupied Baghdad as soon as he is ready. Although I realise that the occupation of Baghdad is a provocation that will probably determine

[1] Report of Mesopotamia Commission.

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the Turks to send large forces to attack us, which, however, it will not be easy for them to do, and although the bad effect of a possible withdrawal in the future cannot be ignored, I am confident right policy at the present time is to take the risk and occupy Baghdad with the least possible delay, relying on you to send two divisions from France as quickly as possible to Mesopotamia. On this understanding I propose, unless I hear from you before Monday to the contrary, to order Nixon to march to Baghdad at once."

As a result, on the 23rd the Secretary of State, India Office, cast the die by telegraphing [1]: "If Nixon is satisfied that the force he has available is sufficient for the operation, he may march on Baghdad. Two divisions will be sent to him as soon as possible, but owing to relief and transport arrangements, reinforcements will take time to despatch. Probable date will be [? wired] later." This telegram was repeated to Nixon on the 24th, the Chief of the General Staff in India adding: "Please take action in accordance with the above."

On the 25th October Lieutenant-General Sir P. H. N. Lake, the Chief of the General Staff in India, telegraphed to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, War Office, to the effect that the General Staff in India agreed as to the value of Alexandretta, the capture of which seems to have been under consideration, as a locality where the advance of the Turks to Mesopotamia by routes other than those from the Caucasus and Angora, and also against Egypt, might be checked. The British must, it was believed, be ready to encounter superior Turkish forces in Mesopotamia, and, therefore, Baghdad, which was the most suitable locality for this purpose, should be occupied at once; but the two Indian divisions should arrive on the Tigris front within two months as a reinforcement. If Baghdad remained in the possession of the Turks, it could be used by them as a convenient base for operations down the Tigris

Report of Mesopotamia Commission.

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or Euphrates, or into Persia. Further, the political point of view must not be overlooked, and our failure to seize Baghdad, now apparently in our grasp, would lay us open, throughout the East, to the imputation of weakness.

It is stated in the Report of the Mesopotamia Commission that: "During the period of three weeks covered by these telegrams a number of meetings had been held, and memoranda written by the Military Advisers of the Government in London. These papers and consultations were less concerned with the taking of Baghdad than with the question whether it would be possible to hold it after it had been taken. On the 4th October General Barrow, the Military Secretary, India Office, had written a memorandum in which he expressed the opinion that to attempt to go to Baghdad with the present force was to incur an unjustifiable risk. On the 6th October the General Staff, in a memorandum, stated that to hold Baghdad, except with forces very much larger than at present with Sir John Nixon, and with proportionately increased river transport, would be to court disasters. Sixty thousand Turks could be assembled and conveyed within a few weeks to Baghdad, and to withdraw from Baghdad after occupation would have a most unfortunate effect. On the 14th October another paper was drawn up by the General Staff on the question of occupying Baghdad. They estimated that if Baghdad was to be taken and occupied, General Nixon must have reinforcements of two Indian divisions. On the 19th the joint Naval and Military General Staff further considered the question, and came to the conclusion that if there were very strong political objections to a withdrawal from Baghdad, then its occupation should not be attempted. On the 16th October General Barrow, the Military Secretary, India Office, modified his previous proposals by stating that if he had a firm promise of two divisions, he was entirely in favour of going to Baghdad. . . . In addition to the ordinary Military Authorities with whom questions of this kind are discussed by the Government, the Prime Minister

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summoned a special Inter-Departmental Committee, composed of members of the India Office, the War Office, the Admiralty, and the Foreign Office, to which he submitted certain questions on the subject of the strategical situation in Mesopotamia."

In every war it is plainly vital that those in authority should classify correctly the relative not the local importance of operations, and this can only be done when all the data requisite for the formation of a just conclusion are available, since knowledge is power in war as it is in the other affairs of life. No one of the authorities who were engaged in the consideration of this question seems, however, to have been in possession of these data, and their findings were in consequence vitiated. The authorities in India admittedly were not well informed either as to the strategical situation in Europe or as to the position in regard to questions of man-power, transport, and the supply of munitions. Further, the state of affairs in respect of transportation in Mesopotamia was not fully appreciated. Naturally, then, their outlook was somewhat restricted and their conclusions correspondingly defective. In addition, although it was recognised that the occupation of Baghdad would tend to relieve pressure on India, there was still more than an inclination to hoard India's resources in armed men, rather than to expend them for the general good as wisely and freely as had been done in 1914. The Commander-in-Chief even went so far as to write to the Viceroy[1]: "It is clear that the Home Government are very anxious that Baghdad should be taken, and they will send us the required force if we hold out, but they will give us nothing if the least sign of willingness to find reinforcements is shown by us, and we shall have to do it all by ourselves, and be so weak everywhere that both in India and in Mesopotamia we shall be in danger." The civilians, sailors, and soldiers in London, on the other hand, who necessarily possessed all the facts lacking to the authorities in India, were not in

[1] Report of Mesopotamia Commission.

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sufficiently close touch with the problems of campaigning in Mesopotamia to venture on more than an academic opinion on the prospects of the campaign. Yet it was on the collectively defective opinions of all these authorities that the final decision must have been based. The moral, therefore, is that the probability of obtaining success cannot fail to be jeopardised when unity of direction and control is absent.

Something may also be said as regards the adventure into which the Empire had now been launched. It is commonplace that war is made to further policy, and, subject to restrictions imposed by the technical problems of war, policy, therefore, must continue to be the predominant factor. At this period things had been going badly for the Western Powers in Europe, and our victories in Mesopotamia had formed one of the few cheerful items of the news that could be given to their own peoples and to neutrals. In view of the supreme, and at the time not unjustifiable, confidence expressed by Sir John Nixon, and endorsed by the authorities in India, as to our ability to capture Baghdad, a great temptation was, therefore, offered to ignore principles and to attempt to gain a comparatively cheap but spectacular success. There was in the scale, moreover, the fact that the climate of France had proved to be unsuitable for our Indian troops, and their transfer to some warmer theatre was, in consequence, desirable. On the other hand, the decision to tempt fortune by an advance to Baghdad was more than likely to produce a change for the worse in the equilibrium between the main and the subsidiary operations[1]; and it came perilously near to the adoption of the fatal system of preserving the popularity of a war by feeding the avarice of the nation with conquests.

No fighting on a large scale had meanwhile taken place on the Tigris front, but there had been skirmishes between

[1] From first to last 880,000 men were employed in Mesopotamia, besides quantities of shipping, land transport, munitions, and stores.

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our cavalry and the enemy's advanced troops; and Townshend had endeavoured to strike at a Turkish detachment which had occupied Kutniyah, but had succeeded only in putting it to flight. Preparations for a further offensive by the troops in Mesopotamia under General Townshend had, however, been carried on. Towards the end of October, therefore, a general forward movement had been made, and as a result there were with Townshend about 12,000 men with 34 guns. Kut-al-Amarah was held by 2,500 men and 2 guns, and there were 2,000 men with 10 guns at Amarah. The garrison of Basrah consisted of about 3,000 men with 4 guns, Nasiriyah was held by 3,000 men with 10 guns; 1,000 men had been left on the Karun; and there were 1,500 men with 5 guns at Bushire. (For further details, see Appendix II.)

An important, perhaps the most important, factor in the attainment of success is to take such measures as were being taken for the concentration of as many troops as possible in the locality where blows were to be struck. Since the operations that were about to be launched were of far greater magnitude as regards their possible results than any which had heretofore been commenced by the British in Mesopotamia, it was, however, essential also to obtain good information as to the enemy's dispositions; and this was a matter of extraordinary difficulty, owing both to the absence of points at which the Turkish Empire was in contact with neutral Powers, and to the unreliability of the reports furnished by the Arabs. But what was even more difficult as well as more necessary was justly to appreciate the value of such items of intelligence as were available.

The prisoners captured at the battle of Kut-al-Amarah had stated their belief that Roumania and Bulgaria had joined the Central Powers, and that a large force was, in consequence, being sent to Mesopotamia; and stories were, we knew, also current in Baghdad in regard to the advance of reinforcements from areas outside Irak. On the other

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hand, the news received from Egypt, where there was a centre for the collection of intelligence, was to the effect that there were no signs of a movement of importance towards Mesopotamia, and the cry of "wolf" had often already been raised in regard to the measures that had been taken by the enemy to check our operations, which had never materialised. It seems now to have been believed that the Turkish force of about two divisions, comprising some 8,000 fighting men with 25 guns, that had, after all the stragglers had rejoined, remained effective after its defeat at Kut-al-Amarah, had been reinforced only by 3,000 men with 5 guns, at most, and that 2,400 of the reinforcements had come from the north; but it was not anticipated that the enemy would receive a further accession of strength. The enemy's troops were, it was thought, disposed as follows: At Baghdad there were about 1,000 men, Kusaibah was held by upwards of 4,000 men, 1,500 were at Ctesiphon, the same number were opposite to this place on the right bank of the Tigris, and there were 2,500 at Zeur. The garrison of Hillah might consist of perhaps 200 men; there were reports of the presence of a raiding column of Turks and Arabs at Badran, which is about 50 miles to the north of Kut-al-Amarah, and that the powerful Shammar and Anizah tribes of Arabs on the right bank of the Tigris above Kut-al-Amarah were definitely hostile.

On the 2nd November a disquieting telegram from the British military *attaché* with the Russian forces in the Caucasus was received in India and communicated to Mesopotamia, to the effect that 3,000 Turks had marched from Bitlis to Mosul, although the date of the movement could not be given. On the next day a message arrived from the intelligence centre in Egypt also reporting the transfer of 3,000 men to Mesopotamia, and that it was possible that the 3rd Composite, or 51st Division as it was called by the enemy, had been sent there. On the 4th news from the military *attaché* was passed to Nixon that

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Khalil Pasha had been at Bitlis with from 7,000 to 8,000 troops, and that as he had been the commander of the 51st Division, the troops under his orders might exceed the strength of a division. It was further considered that the 51st Division might be moving to Mesopotamia. On the 5th November a report from Egypt was sent to India and transmitted to Force D to the effect that there were indications that Mahmud Mukhtar, a bold and energetic soldier, who had been Turkish War Minister in 1908, might be coming from Konia to oppose the British. It was stated that the troops under his command might include the 51st, an Anatolian division of good quality, and also one division from Constantinople and one from northern Syria, neither of which was as efficient as the 51st Division. As a minimum, eight weeks would, it was thought, be required for the transportation of a division from Constantinople to Baghdad, and six weeks for the movement of a division from northern Syria. The authorities in India also computed that five weeks would be occupied in the transit of troops from Bitlis to Baghdad.

Sir John Nixon now addressed queries to Simla as to the date on which it was believed that Khalil had left Bitlis and as to the 51st Division, and our military *attaché* with the Russians was therefore asked to furnish this information, which was urgently required. On the 7th November the Staff in India telegraphed that it was thought that the 51st Division had probably been moved to Konia owing to a mutiny which had broken out amongst its troops, and that the military *attaché* now reported that the 3,000 men that had previously been mentioned had not left Bitlis. Next day a telegram was sent from Cairo to India in which it was reported that on the 10th October nine battalions had passed through Homs on the way to Aleppo, and that two more battalions had moved in this direction on the 15th; it was also stated that, on the latter date, four battalions had moved from Lebanon southwards. This information does not seem to have been passed to Force D,

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but, on the 10th November, Sir John Nixon was informed of a report that, on the 14th October, Khalil had at Bitlis 7,000 men with 4 guns, but that there was no confirmation of the news that this force had left the place. It was also mentioned that, in a report dated the 23rd October from a Russian officer who was at Hamadan in Persia, a body of from 15,000 to 20,000 Turks who had originally been intended for operations against the British in Egypt was said to have been at Dair on the Euphrates on the 2nd of this month. On the other hand, it was stated that the agent who brought this news was inclined to exaggeration, and that he had also reported that the British were in position along the Persian frontier towards Khanikin and were only 20 miles from Baghdad. Next day another statement, dated the 8th November, was received from Hamadan, which had been obtained from a reliable agent who had returned from Mosul on the 1st November. This man had brought news that the following troops had begun to leave Mosul, which was being used as a centre for the training of drafts and new units: 4,000 had gone eastwards, 15,000 to Baghdad, and 12,000 northwards. He also reported that, between the 14th September and the 13th October, five squadrons well equipped with guns and machine guns had reached Mosul on their way to Baghdad. In addition he said that 8,000 men with several guns and machine guns and half a dozen German officers were in Mosul, that armaments were being sent there from Aleppo, and that it was difficult to make a definite statement as to the direction in which the men under Khalil were moving. This report, it was noted, neither confirmed nor referred to the news of the presence of troops at Dair on the Euphrates, and the latter statement was not considered to be reliable. It had also been ascertained from other sources that were employed by the Russians, for the acquisition of information, that the 3,000 troops were still at Bitlis.

Sir John Nixon telegraphed on the 12th November to

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the authorities in India his views on the significance of this stream of information, remarking that the report as to the presence of a large number of Turks at Dair had been discredited by the inaccurate positions assigned by this agent to the British. Eight quick-firing field guns and perhaps 1,000 details were, he said, the only troops credibly reported by our agents to have reached Baghdad from the Euphrates.

On the 13th there was news of activity on the railway between Samarrah and Baghdad ; and on the 15th November Nixon was informed that the General Staff of the Russian force in the Caucasus now believed that the 51st Division had moved from Bitlis to Erzeroum, and that regrouping of the Turkish army on this front had been made with a view of freeing troops for despatch to Mesopotamia. Next day information came in from the War Office that the report of the presence of 15,000 Turks at Dair had been corroborated, but not from a very reliable source, and that this agent had stated that in the last six weeks 15,000 men had left Aleppo, Hamah, Homs, and Damascus for Baghdad. At the same time the Staff in Cairo forwarded information that a reliable man, who had left Syria on the 29th September, had brought in reports of the movement eastwards of 8,000 men with guns. On the 16th November the War Office sent information, which was considered absolutely reliable, that a Turkish expedition was on the way to Baghdad ; and on the 17th news was despatched that General von der Goltz had left for Baghdad on the 10th November, and that 30,000 Turkish troops were marching from Anatolia to Irak under Khalil ; but it was observed that confirmation of this last item of intelligence was required from our military *attaché* in the Caucasus. This confirmation had already been obtained, for the *attaché* had also telegraphed on the 17th that the General Staff of the Russian force in the Caucasus were informed, on reliable authority, that the force that had been organised by Khalil had left Bitlis on the 16th October for Baghdad, and that the 51st Division formed part of this group.

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The current of intelligence was now flowing too strongly in one direction not to arouse anxiety in India, and, on the 19th November, Lieutenant-General Sir Percy Lake, the Chief of the General Staff in India, addressed an enquiry to Nixon as to whether information had been obtained of the occupation of Baghdad by a strong Turkish force. To this query Sir John Nixon sent two replies. In the first he remarked that "for more than a fortnight my own agents have given me similar news of a large force under Von der Goltz, but at present I do not accept these reports as conclusive for various reasons." The second telegram, which was addressed to Sir Percy Lake, was somewhat less confident in tone. In this Sir John, who had, it will be remembered, already declared himself as strongly in favour of an advance to Baghdad, pointed out that so long as his force was at a distance from this city, the arrival of small parties of enemy's troops could not be prevented. If, however, these small parties were portions of a large force, it was calculated that the British would receive a fortnight's notice of its concentration. The words "large force" were, he said, used in the sense of a force sufficiently strong to induce him to reconsider his plans regarding an advance on Baghdad. Once this city had been reached, the British would be in position to destroy small parties of the enemy as they came up, and thus prevent the Turks from moving forward piecemeal; and they could also calculate on obtaining earlier notice of any important concentration. There were, it was added, strong indications that it was the intention of the enemy to send a large force against the British, but beyond the troops at Ctesiphon there was no such force of whose presence within striking distance there was proof.

The news of the enemy's movements that had meanwhile been obtained locally by the British was at first somewhat conflicting. Early in November there were reports from agents of the arrival in Baghdad of large reinforcements, but these were contradicted. They were further discredited

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because, in the few reconnaissances that our airmen had been able to make, owing both to lack of machines and to the unreliability of those that were available, not many signs of camps or bivouacs were seen such as might indicate the presence of troops near Baghdad; and owing apparently to the distance separating the two main forces, and to the great mobility of the enemy's advanced troops, who usually avoided action, the British were unable to use the expedient commonly employed in war of obtaining information through the capture of prisoners. There had, as mentioned above, been rumours at the end of October that a force of Turks amounting to 2,000 infantry with 4 guns, supported by 1,000 Arabs, had moved to Badran with the object of making an attack on Kut-al-Amarah, which might be consequent on the arrival of reinforcements; but this rumour again was not confirmed. It was, however, thought that possibly a third and perhaps a fourth new Turkish division were in process of formation at Baghdad. Towards the middle of November reports were also constantly received as to the arrival of Khalil Bey in the city, but it was not certain whether this was the same Khalil who had been at Bitlis. Not long afterwards it was said that all Christians were being moved from Baghdad to Samarrah, that 700 troops had arrived from Mosul, and that 3,000 men, with aircraft, were on their way down the Tigris on rafts.

News of large Turkish reinforcements had, as has been pointed out, many times during the campaign in Mesopotamia reached the headquarters of Force D, but so far the troops had not materialised. It might, therefore, quite plausibly be argued that the information now to hand had been spread by the enemy with the object of producing hesitation and delay on the part of the British, and of gaining time for the movements of forces from Asia Minor and Syria. And had Sir John Nixon paused on account of the receipt of intelligence which eventually turned out to be false, his conduct would doubtless have been stigmatised as lacking both in resolution and insight.

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The accurate interpretation of intelligence evidently depends a good deal on the mood of the recipient, and also as to whether his mind is or is not biased in any particular direction in regard to the matter at issue. Sir John Nixon held strong views on the advantages to be gained by an advance, and the constant reports as to the movements of enemy troops to Mesopotamia seem, therefore, to have convinced him that the situation would not only be clarified, but the difficulty and danger of his position would also be mitigated by the occupation of Baghdad. That Sir John would have been well advised to look more carefully before he leaped is now evident, for the event has shown that he was mistaken, though only by a little, in his reading of the intelligence, and that he failed to adjust his thoughts correctly to things. It must remain a matter of speculation what action would have been taken by General Nixon had he ascertained definitely that considerable reinforcements had reached or were about to reach the enemy. Possibly it might, in this case, have been held that the British had proceeded so far that to stand still would be danger, to recede ruin, and that the only course was to go on. But urgent demands would certainly have been made for the hastening of the movement of reinforcements to the army in Mesopotamia. It is more than probable that the 6th Division would have reached Baghdad had the advance from Aziziyah been commenced even as late as the 23rd October. Whether the city could then have been held would, as has been stated, have depended largely on the factor of time as influenced by transportation; that is, on whether the British could bring up reinforcements in time to meet the counter-attack which would probably have been delivered by the Turks.

In misreading the import of the information that was at his disposal, General Nixon was doing so in good company, and the saying attributed to Turenne is of eternal application: "Speak to me of a general who has made no mistakes in war, and you speak of one who has seldom made war."

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To those who have the advantage of judging after the event it may seem inexplicable that Napoleon, in 1808, "forgetting his own maxim that war is not a conjectural art, took it for granted that the English army was falling back to Portugal, and without ascertaining that it was so, acted upon this supposition," while Sir John Moore advanced against the lines of communication of the French. It may seem equally strange that, in November 1812, "Wellington remained too confidently in Salamanca, and when the first report said that the enemy were over the Tormes, made a caustic observation that he would not recommend it to some of them. Soon, however, other reports convinced him of his mistake." Again, it is a fact that, in August 1870, Von Moltke at first discredited information to the effect that MacMahon was advancing to attempt the relief of Bazaine's army, which had been shut up by the Germans in Metz, and suspected that certain statements that had been made in the French newspapers were false and intended to divert the Germans from advancing on Paris.

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CHAPTER II

THE BATTLE OF CTESIPHON

WHILE this intelligence had been flowing in to the headquarters of Force D, Major-General G. V. Kemball, the senior officer of Sir John Nixon's General Staff, had, for a second or third time, flown to Aziziyah on the 5th November for the purpose of consulting with General Townshend as to the forward movement, and it seems that the strength of Townshend's force came into question during the conference. According to the report of the Mesopotamia Commission on this incident, "the matter is not quite clear, but General Kemball's opinion is that the reinforcements which General Townshend received—i.e. five squadrons of cavalry, the battalions of infantry (of the 30th Brigade) and a R.H.A. battery—were very much what he asked for, and there was also the promise of two divisions from France, the leading troops of which General Kemball expected to arrive at Basrah at the end of November. Whether General Townshend was satisfied or not is not certain, but he does not seem to have pressed his objections hard."

On the 8th, 9th, and 11th, accordingly, the following reinforcements came up from Kut-al-Amarah to Townshend: one squadron 7th Lancers, one squadron 16th Cavalry, one squadron 23rd Cavalry which became divisional cavalry; the 2/7th Gurkhas, 24th Punjabis, 76th Punjabis, two companies of the 48th Pioneers; 100 bullocks, 24 carts and a number of donkeys, while additional land transport was also on the way to the front. It seems to have been agreed that, in addition to animals for the carriage of ammunition, 1st and 2nd line transport on land would be

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provided for the 6th Division, and that this transport, amounting to about 1,000 mules, 620 camels, 660 carts, and 240 donkeys, besides bullocks and cows, should carry rations for two days and a greatcoat or blanket per man. The remainder of the troops must rely on the shipping, which would hold supplies for about 14 days for the whole force, but no tents. The vessels that were to be used were three tugs, and five small river steamers and their barges,[1] but two of these steamers, the *Blosse Lynch* and *Mosul*, were also to be employed as hospital clearing ships, preparations being made to accommodate in them 500 severely wounded men who would be sent to Basrah. The slightly injured could, it was thought, be conveyed to and treated in Baghdad, after this place had been captured.

When the last of the reinforcements from Kut-al-Amarah reached him, General Townshend gave orders for the bulk of the entrenchments which had been made by his troops to be filled in both at Aziziyah and also at Frazer's Post, a detachment on the right bank of the river which had been placed there to assure the safety of the bridge of boats over it and of the shipping. An entrenched zone was, however, retained for the use of a small detachment that was to be left at the former to guard a field depot of supplies for seven days which was to be formed there. Kut-al-Amarah, where there were supplies for ten or twelve weeks, was to be used as the advanced base.

General Townshend had now united his force of 16 battalions, 11 squadrons, 32 guns [2] on land, and a flight of aeroplanes. There were besides the River Section, manned by artillery personnel, of four 4·7-inch guns and two 5-inch guns in horseboats and barges, which were towed by two

[1] A barge was generally lashed on to each side of a tug or steamer. Also see Appendix II as to shipping available.

[2] Two 5-inch guns of the 86th Battery, two 4-inch guns of the 104th Battery, four 5-inch howitzers of the 1/5th Hampshire Howitzer Battery, eighteen 18-pounders of the 63rd, 76th, and 82nd Field Batteries, and six 13-pounders of S Horse Battery. There were "post" guns, 15-pounders, in addition.

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small stern-wheelers carrying pom-poms and Maxim guns; and also the guns in the four armed Naval vessels: the *Firefly*, a new river gunboat carrying one 4-inch gun, one 6-pounder, and two Maxims, which had recently arrived in Mesopotamia, the steam yacht *Comet*, armed with one 3-pounder and some machine guns; and the tugs *Shaitan* and *Sumana*, each carrying one 12-pounder, one or two 3-pounders, and one Maxim. He could apparently now dispose of from 16,000 to 17,000 troops, including those of the administrative services, out of a total of from 24,000 to 25,000 then under the command of Sir John Nixon; who, in view of his other liabilities, such as the garrisoning of Nasiriyah and Ahwaz and the securing of the long line of communication to the sea, can certainly not be accused of having failed to concentrate his troops at the decisive point. On the other hand, the infantry units were still much below their war establishment, and did not, on the average, number more than about 650 men, while two out of the three British infantry battalions were only some 550 strong; and it may be pointed out that weakness in numbers does unquestionably lower the confidence and efficiency of a unit, whereas when it is full of men a sense of power is imparted to all ranks.

An unfortunate incident occurred on the 11th November, for a couple of airmen who had been sent to reconnoitre and to cut telegraph wires to the north and west of Baghdad did not return. This was a very serious matter, in view of the news that was being received in regard to the despatch of Turkish reinforcements to Baghdad, for it became necessary to discontinue long-distance flights, since neither the airmen nor the machines were available in sufficient numbers to enable the British to run the risk of losing other pilots, observers, and aeroplanes.

A first small step in the advance was also made on the 11th, when Brigadier-General W. G. Hamilton, who had succeeded Major-General Fry as commander of the 18th Infantry Brigade, was despatched to Kutniyah with a

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force consisting of the *Sumana*, the 6th Cavalry Brigade under Brigadier-General H. L. Roberts, the 18th Infantry Brigade, the 63rd Field Battery, half of the 17th Sappers and Miners, and certain Ambulances and other units. Hamilton was in addition to reconnoitre the routes leading to Zeur, and was to ascertain whether there were guns in position at Baghdadiyah which could molest our shipping. It appears from the Turkish narrative that, at this period, there was on the right bank near Baghdadiyah a volunteer tribal brigade of Arabs about 3,000 strong, stiffened by one battalion of the 35th Division. On the other bank there was also a volunteer tribal brigade, a cavalry brigade of about 400 sabres, and a company of camelmen, but such infantry as had been at Zeur had been withdrawn to Ctesiphon.

Contact with the above was established on the 13th, when Hamilton sent the *Sumana*, the Cavalry Brigade, and the 7th Rajputs towards Zeur. At 10 a.m. a number of Arabs first appeared on a mound near Baghdadiyah, and soon afterwards the 7th Lancers and 7th Rajputs were engaged in a vigorous fire fight with a force of about 1,000 Arabs, who were in a belt of scrub on the right bank of the Tigris. The rest of the Cavalry Brigade also came under fire from trenches near Zeur. Baghdadiyah was now shelled by S Battery, the *Sumana*, and the *Firefly*, in the last of which Townshend had himself come up-river. No reply was made by enemy guns, and the ships came only under heavy rifle fire from the banks of the Tigris; but at noon, when the British began to draw off, the whole horizon on the left bank became at once alive with Arabs moving in widely extended order with the object of intercepting the detachment. The enemy, however, were kept at bay by the fire of S Battery, and, on coming in addition under the fire of a section of the 63rd Field Battery, which had been sent out with a battalion from Kutniyah, the Arabs abandoned their advance. The action cost the British no more than half a dozen wounded men and a few horses.

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According to his general custom, Sir John Nixon, although he was far from being well, arrived at the front on the 13th with a portion of his Headquarters Staff in the river steamer *Malamir*; but as had been the case both at the battles of Kurnah and Kut-al-Amarah, he did not assume the executive command of the troops, which was left in the hands of General Townshend. It seems, however, that Sir John Nixon had suggested that General Townshend should deliver his attack on the enemy before the 18th November, but, owing to the non-arrival of a convoy, this was not practicable. This convoy of 35 mahailas,[1] some carrying supplies and fuel, which had sailed from Kut-al-Amarah on the 28th October, encountered head winds and other difficulties of navigation, and in consequence did not reach Aziziyah until the 14th November, when the last of the land transport also arrived; and although three river steamers which were also on the way with stores and supplies did not come in, Townshend then decided not to wait for them but to begin his advance.

As long ago as the 4th October Townshend had, as has been stated, submitted a general plan of operations to Sir John Nixon, and this plan was amplified in proposals that were forwarded on the 8th November, about ten days before the commencement of the final advance, to General Headquarters. In order that the reader may be in a position to understand these proposals, it will be necessary, before entering into their detail, to explain that the whole area which was now to be traversed by the force under General Townshend has been described as being almost as flat as if it had been planed down to a dead level. The landscape, therefore, was on the whole featureless, dreary and bare, blue sky above and brown plain beneath. There was only the yellow, turbid river, from two hundred to three hundred yards wide, to vary the monotony, as it hurried round or over innumerable sandspits between high steep banks of earth, which were not broken except

[1] Barges that move under sail, but can be towed.

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where the ancient canals had taken off from its bed. Not a tree was visible in any direction, but in places, and especially near the sites of great cities such as Ctesiphon, there were both scattered mounds of earth, and the banks of ruined canals great and small; and here the ground also was scarred and furrowed by a network of shallow disused irrigation channels. In many localities there was also a scrubby growth of liquorice from two to three feet in height, thick near the river, sparse in the dry areas away from its banks. Metalled roads there were none, and the routes consisted of tracks from which mounds and scrub had been cleared, and where ramps had been cut in the banks of canals or channels. Mirage distorting every object was a daily phenomenon, and when, as was often the case, this was accompanied by a dusty haze blown up by wind, all but comparatively near objects were blotted out.

In addition to a general acquaintance with the topography and to more detailed information which had been obtained by our airmen, General Townshend now based his plans on intelligence, which had been gained from various sources, that the bulk of the enemy's force was standing on the left bank of the Tigris some four miles to the north of Ctesiphon, where there were 4,000 men encamped near a bridge of boats. It was believed that on the left bank, near Ctesiphon, there were also 1,500 infantry and 500 cavalry. There was an obstruction in the Tigris above Bustan, and the enemy's front line on the left bank was to the south and east of Ctesiphon. This line consisted of a series of redoubts linked up by trenches extending for a distance of six miles and ending in a strong redoubt which stood on a couple of conspicuous mounds. Two miles behind the first there was a second line covering the bridge of boats, and this line ran for a distance of three miles parallel to the first line; but then at Yesi hillock it apparently bent away towards the Diyalah, and this portion, if entrenched at all, had not been so well fortified as the remainder. Behind the left of the second line there were

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a couple of bridges over the Diyalah, and these were also commanded by groups of entrenchments which had been placed on the right bank of this river. On the right bank of the Tigris there were two lines of defences. The first lay to the west of the dry loop or old bed of the stream, and stretched out from the existing course of the river for a distance of three miles; the other was said to be five miles farther back. These two lines were believed to be garrisoned by 1,500 infantry and 500 cavalry. In addition to the troops mentioned above, it was thought that there were some 2,500 infantry, 700 cavalrymen, 400 camelmen at Zeur; and the total of the enemy's army might be between 11,000 and 13,000 combatants, with from 30 to 40 guns. (Map 1.)

General Townshend proposed that his force should march along the left bank of the Tigris by the shortest route to Baghdad, and he would, if possible, so manœuvre as to induce the Turks to fight in the open. As a first step the British would advance united against the enemy's covering force at Zeur and endeavour to destroy it. Should the Turks fall back on Ctesiphon, the British would either follow as rapidly as possible and attack the positions on the left bank, using the same enveloping tactics as had been employed at the battle of Kut-al-Amarah, and forcing the Turks into the angle between the Tigris and Diyalah; or they would cross to the right bank of the Tigris, and move up it with the object of obliging the enemy to give battle on ground where long lines of trenches had not been prepared, and of enveloping their right. At first Townshend had leant towards the second alternative, but reports as to the broken and accidented nature of the ground on the right bank, which was probably the site of a large portion of the city of Seleucia, as well as the presence of thick scrub, had caused him to change his mind and to give preference to an advance by the left bank against the principal force of the Turks. This general plan was approved by Sir John Nixon, although he had also in the first instance shown a preference

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for advancing against the enemy's right. But Nixon had agreed that the final decision should be deferred until the British had closed with the Turks.

As regards the action of the enemy, General Townshend considered that the Turks would probably continue to rely on defensive measures, as their troops possessed neither mobility nor power of manœuvre. This policy, he said, had become almost traditional with the enemy, who fought best behind earthworks. Further, it was, in Townshend's opinion, sound strategy for the Turks to play for time in Mesopotamia, Syria, and Arabia, and in doing so enable the greatest possible effort to be made in Gallipoli, where the real decision was being fought out.

It seems that when General Townshend wrote this review he was not fully aware of the reports which had been received at Nixon's headquarters as to the movement of reinforcements to Mesopotamia. Just before leaving Aziziyah he did, indeed, question the head of the section dealing with intelligence at General Headquarters in regard to "the many local Arab reports we had heard of large reinforcements arriving at Ctesiphon." [1] This officer replied: "'We have heard these reports, but we have no official confirmation of them.' . . . He also told me that Sir John Nixon had received a telegram from the War Office, London, saying that they had reliable information that an expedition was on its way from Turkey to Baghdad." General Townshend did not modify his proposals in consequence of these statements, and perhaps he felt that, as strategy was in question rather than tactics, modification would, if necessary, be suggested by the Commander-in-Chief.

Although a commander-in-chief is responsible for the conduct of a campaign, it is evident that the system of calling for a plan of action some time in advance, and, as in this instance, before the commander has even seen the battlefield, possesses disadvantages. In this case the drawbacks are particularly obvious, for General Townshend

[1] *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, Major-General Sir C. Townshend.

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was obliged, however tentatively, to formulate projects on topographical and other data which plainly were not as accurate as could have been the case; and it has justly been said that he "that judges without informing himself to the utmost that he is capable, cannot acquit himself of judging amiss." There is also the further objection to this system, that, once attention is focused in a given direction, the tendencies that are aroused continually force themselves in the consciousness, and a change of purpose, therefore, will be rendered somewhat difficult.

On the 15th November Townshend left the 17th Infantry Brigade group at Aziziyah to wait for the missing vessels, and to look after the Bridging Train, the River Section of the Artillery, and other shipping. At the same time two companies of the 24th Punjabis, with two 4-inch guns of the 104th Heavy Battery for which transport was not available, one 15-pounder post gun manned by Indian Artillery Volunteers, and from 300 to 400 sick men were posted at Aziziyah as a guard to the depot of supplies and stores. With the remainder he marched to Kutniyah, and as usual Arabs or Turkish cavalry hovered round the troops during the march, now appearing from the mirage, a daily phenomenon which exaggerated, distorted, or concealed every object, and the accompanying haze of dust raised by the wind, and then disappearing again, but taking care to keep out of range. A more serious menace was encountered in the shape of floating mines that were detected and destroyed near Kutniyah.

The 16th passed without incident, on the 17th most of the shipping reached Kutniyah, escorted by the 17th Brigade group, and a couple of new aeroplanes were also received. The Bridging Train came in at 5 p.m., a bridge was at once commenced over the Tigris, and although the bridge was not less than 250 yards in length, it was finished in five hours. During the 18th November the rest of the shipping was brought up, and all, therefore, was at last ready for the great adventure.

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In the morning the 17th Brigade group (less the 119th) crossed the bridge and bivouacked near it on the right bank, both for the protection of the bridge and because of the presence of the hostile villages of Baghdadiyah, Suwairah, and Juwaimsah. In addition a report had been received that there were 500 Turkish cavalry with a couple of guns not far distant on the right bank of the Tigris, and it was necessary, therefore, to take steps to clear away the enemy on this bank, who might otherwise have hindered or even checked the passage of the shipping. Further, the fact that Townshend had again divided his force would tend to mystify the enemy as to his intentions, although the British would necessarily be disunited and liable to be defeated in detail.

Some anxiety and excitement, indeed, were caused in the evening by reports from our airmen that two bodies of Turks were advancing from Ctesiphon. It was affirmed that one of these, which was from 4,000 to 5,000 in strength, was moving on Zeur along the left bank; also that from 5,000 to 6,000 men were advancing on the other bank, and that half of these were not more than from three to four miles distant from the 17th Brigade. Apparently the only troops, besides Arabs, who were on the move on the right bank belonged to a battalion which was marching to the relief of the battalion that had been employed on duty with the advanced guard, and no advance was made by the enemy on the left bank. It is not impossible, therefore, that, as had already happened more than once, the observers mistook, in the mirage and dust, Arabs for troops, or sheep and cattle for men. The result, however, of these reports was to cause General Townshend to take precautions for the safety of the 17th Brigade and shipping. The units of the brigade, therefore, stood to arms all night, after sending picquets a couple of miles away to the neck of the bend in which they had bivouacked. From 5 a.m. until 2.30 p.m. on the 19th the men also worked hard to entrench this neck. In addition the bridge, which had been dismantled by 6.30 p.m. on the 18th, was again rebuilt.

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On the morning of the 19th November Townshend marched off between eight and nine o'clock with the remainder of his force in two columns against the enemy's troops that were believed to be at Zeur. It seems that his general idea was to send the 18th Brigade group, consisting of the 18th Infantry Brigade, the 63rd Field Battery, half of the 22nd Sappers and Miners, and three sections of Field Ambulances, and also the Divisional Troops, directly on Zeur by the Baghdad route. At the same time the 16th Brigade Group, comprising the 16th Infantry Brigade, three battalions of the 30th Infantry Brigade, the 82nd Field Battery, half of the 22nd Sappers and Miners, and five sections of Field Ambulances, accompanied by the Cavalry Brigade, the Machine Gun Battery, and the two armoured cars, was to make a circuit of three or four miles to the north round an area of marsh, and then come in on the enemy's left and rear.

The Turkish force, which, as stated above, consisted only of cavalry, camelmen, and Arab tribesmen, was holding an entrenched camp placed behind a dry canal, and the latter had also been prepared for defence. The enemy, however, made no attempt at resistance, and left their camp as soon as our horse artillery guns opened fire. Although the armoured cars did some execution, and the cavalry galloped for three-quarters of an hour in pursuit, under a desultory fire from Arabs who, as usual, were hanging on to our flanks, they were unable to catch the Turks; and at noon the action was broken off, our casualties having amounted to fewer than half a dozen men wounded and twice this number of horses. The infantry did not reach Zeur until some time later, and the transport only came in after nightfall; it was, therefore, not until nearly 4 p.m. that orders were received calling up the 17th Brigade and the shipping. The battalions of this brigade then left their newly excavated trenches and marched along the right bank; but they did not reach the vicinity of Zeur until after midnight, having been delayed by scrub, soft sand, and a number of dry

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irrigation channels. The Bridging Train and the shipping arrived early on the 20th, so that it was 11 a.m. before the 17th Brigade could begin to cross the Tigris with their land transport and follow the remainder, who had already advanced on Lajj.

This place had been occupied without resistance, only the usual rabble of Arabs having been met, who drew off after firing a few rounds at long range. But during the advance two battalions of the 30th Brigade were detached with a couple of field guns to the loop near Suwairah for the protection of the Bridging Train and shipping from molestation; for, owing to the swiftness of the current, the vessels could move at a slow pace only. It was noon on the 21st November, therefore, before the whole river convoy was able to reach Lajj, after passing through rows of Arab spectators, who issued from their numerous villages of wattle and daub on the banks of the Tigris to gaze at the long procession of boats.

Meanwhile General Townshend, after riding out with his commanders to look at the enemy's position, had completed his arrangements; and having definitely decided not to operate on the right bank of the Tigris, he issued battle orders accordingly on the 21st at 1.30 p.m. These were also explained at a conference which was held of brigadiers and other senior officers.

The orders began with the statement that, according to the reports [1] received from the intelligence and air services,

[1] Actually the Turkish force consisted of the 35th and 38th, both Arab or Arab-Kurd divisions, the 45th, apparently a Turkish division, the bulk of the 51st, a Turkish division, the cavalry brigade, and two brigades of Arab auxiliaries. The establishment of a division comprised three infantry regiments each of three battalions, a machine-gun unit, a varying number of guns, usually in four-gun batteries, some engineers and administrative units; and the fighting men might number from 3,000 to 7,000. The total strength of the force, including Arab auxiliaries and administrative troops, was nearly 36,000, and the regular fighting strength about 23,000, of whom 19,000 were infantry. There were 54 guns, including 7 heavy guns, 12 mountain guns, and 2 old mortars, and there were also 19 machine guns. Seven battalions of the 51st Division with two 4-gun quick-firing field batteries, one 6-gun mountain battery, and a machine-gun company

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from 10,000 to 11,000 Turks with 30 guns were in position at Ctesiphon. Of these troops 7,500 were on the left bank of the Tigris, from 1,500 to 2,500 being in the first-line trenches, while from 4,000 to 5,000 were at Kusaibah ready to occupy the second line. It appeared that the armed tug *Pioneer*, which had been seized by the Turks on the declaration of war, was also lying in the Tigris near the position. A report that had been handed in by an airman as the orders were being written had indicated, however, that 4,000 men with a battery were advancing to the left of the first line.

General Townshend then stated that, in order to destroy the Turkish forces that were standing on the left bank of the Tigris, he intended to contain the troops who were holding the front of the enemy's position with a minimum force, and with a maximum force to execute a turning movement against their left flank and rear. This turning movement was, however, to be preliminary to a decisive attack which was to be delivered by the principal mass against the flank that had been turned.

A preparatory attack was to be confided to the minimum force under Brigadier-General F. A. Hoghton. This would comprise the 17th Infantry Brigade (less half of the 103rd left to guard the shipping at Lajj), the 76th Field Battery, two guns of the 86th Heavy Battery on land, the 48th Pioneers, 17th Company of Sappers and Miners, and one squadron of the 23rd Cavalry, about 3,500 fighting men; and it was to move forward at 2 p.m. on the 21st, on a frontage of 1,500 yards or a mile, with as much display as possible, to a point two miles to the north-east of Bustan.

had recently arrived from Mosul, and two more battalions of this division were on their way to the front. Of the other divisions, the 35th and 38th had been defeated at Kut-al-Amarah and other actions in Mesopotamia, and were full of recruits whose efficiency was not of a high standard. No German officers were present at the battle. The British were not aware of the arrival of either the 45th or 51st Divisions, but believed, apparently, that the 35th and 38th Divisions had been reinforced only by detachments and individual units, aggregating to about a weak division composed partly of Turkish, partly of Arab troops.

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At daylight (about 6.30 a.m.) on the 22nd Hoghton was to attack, with great show and pretence, that part of the enemy's position extending from a point just south of the water redoubt to the redoubt marked X. His troops would be supported not only by the guns of his group, but also by the four 4·7-inch guns and the two 5-inch guns of the 86th Heavy Battery in horseboats and barges, which, with the Naval vessels, would be placed to the south-east of Bustan. Hoghton was to pin the enemy to his position and induce him to use up his reserves; but, on seeing the principal mass advance, Hoghton's attack was also to be pressed home. After having gained the enemy's position, his troops were to sweep southwards and assist the armed ships, which meanwhile would have engaged the trenches in the loop of the Tigris, to pass the new cut that had been made in 1912 in the loop near the southern end of the Turkish first line.

The turning attack, a wide turning movement of some ten miles, was to be carried out by a force of about 3,000 men under Brigadier-General Hamilton, consisting of the 18th Infantry Brigade, the 63rd Field Battery, half of the 22nd Company of Sappers and Miners, one Pack Wireless Station in carts, and four sections of Field Ambulances. This detachment was, at 7.30 a.m. on the 22nd, and some time after the preparatory attack had been launched, to move with " boldness, vigour, and resolution " against the left flank and rear of the enemy's fully prepared second-line trenches, with Kusaibah as final objective. Major-General Sir Charles Melliss, with a flying column, about 2,000 strong, consisting of the 6th Cavalry Brigade, the 76th Punjabis, who would in part be carried in carts, the Maxim Battery, the two armoured cars, one Pack Wireless Station, the Cavalry Ammunition Column, and Cavalry Field Ambulance, would work in intimate co-operation with Hamilton, moving two miles on his outer flank; and these troops were to try to render the second-line trenches of the Turks untenable by means of enfilade and reverse fire.

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The principal mass, or general reserve, about 4,500 fighting men, was to be under Major-General W. S. Delamain. This group was to comprise the 16th Infantry Brigade, the 2/7th Gurkhas, and half of the 24th Punjabis of the 30th Infantry Brigade under Colonel S. H. Climo, the 82nd Field Battery, the 1/5th Hampshire Howitzer Battery, half of the 22nd Company of Sappers and Miners, and three sections of Field Ambulances; it would remain under the direction of Townshend, and would eventually be launched against the conspicuous redoubt on the left of the enemy's first line, which was christened Vital Point. The advance of the principal mass was to be the signal for the vigorous prosecution of the attack by the remainder; and, in order to assist the operations of the troops under Delamain, the guns with the turning attack should then, if possible, be directed on the Vital Point.

The principal mass, the turning attack, and the flying column were to march under cover of darkness to the positions from which the attacks were to be made, moving at first as one body under Delamain. The principal mass was to halt near an embankment and a few sandhills some 5,000 yards to the east of Vital Point, which was generally called by the shorter name of V.P. The others were then to move on independently, the turning attack halting some three miles beyond the principal mass, and the flying column still farther to the west.

The *rôle* of the airmen was to give information as to the direction in which the enemy's main body was moving when it fell back; and to observe and report the advance of reinforcements from Baghdad, and also any hostile operations on the right bank of the Tigris.

Each man was to have on his person one day's full ration, in addition to the emergency ration, and as much water as possible. The first-line transport, consisting of camels, bullocks, cows, and donkeys, would also apparently carry food for one day, blankets, ammunition, and entrenching tools; but this day's ration and the blankets

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were to remain, until they were required, with the second-line transport at Lajj, under the smallest possible baggage guards.

The problem now before General Townshend was similar to that which he had so effectively solved at Kut-al-Amarah, for the Turks had, so far as he was aware, again placed their force astride the Tigris, and the only means of moving troops from one bank to the other was by way of the bridge at Kusaibah, which was close to their second line. Further, as before, General Townshend had to devise a plan to defeat the enemy, while at the same time safeguarding the shipping, on which the existence of his force depended, from being destroyed by the enemy. As the water was now much below the level of the banks of the Tigris, the Turks, therefore, must be prevented from gaining the banks in the stretches where the steamers were lying.

The position was certainly one of great strength. The first line redoubts to the north of High Wall were well wired, especially that at V.P.; from the second line any attempt to envelop V.P. would probably be taken in flank, and a force advancing against the flank of the second line near Yesi would be exposed to an attack by troops placed on the Diyalah. A position behind the latter would have been too near to Baghdad to allow of freedom of manœuvre, and the British would also have been able to move northwards along the river without drawing away from water. But so far as the ground on the left bank near Ctesiphon was concerned, a series of lines somewhat farther west would perhaps have served the enemy's purpose better, which presumably was to safeguard Baghdad pending the arrival of reinforcements; for the right could then have been supported by the Tigris and the left by the Diyalah, both large and unfordable rivers, while a tract, from which water could have been cut off, would have extended in front of the position and between the rivers. In addition, the fact that the British shipping was on the Tigris and,

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as pointed out above, must be protected, would have hindered a movement on a large scale round the Turkish left and across the Diyalah. On the other hand, the area on the right bank in continuation would apparently not have been so favourable for passive defence as the line that was actually selected behind the old bed of the Tigris; and, unless the two series of positions had lain in prolongation of one another, the power of the troops holding them to afford each other mutual support would have been reduced. It is possible, therefore, that the choice of position was influenced by these considerations, and also by the fact that a long stretch of river could be swept by fire from the neighbourhood of Bustan, and that the mounds at V.P. and other points gave the defenders command over the ground in front of them. Further, water for the front line was obtained by pumping it into a channel near Salman Pak, and it was then distributed through branches of this channel to various points in the position.

Like every position, the alignment that was actually selected was not free from weak points, of which an able commander who was about to attack it would not be slow to take advantage. If the area on the right bank was difficult of approach, it was at least as difficult for the enemy to advance from it; but the Turks apparently did not expect that it would be attacked and it was not strongly held. In addition, the forward trenches on the left bank ran for three miles along a belt of thick scrub in a loop formed by the Tigris, and to the west of a stretch of deep, level sand; and their garrison, therefore, could be ignored, and would also be liable to be captured if the British broke the line farther to the north. The second line was only about two miles from the first, and for a distance of between two and three miles its right was also parallel to the Tigris; so that if a disaster occurred on the enemy's left, and it may again be stated that the left of the second line beyond Yesi was not strongly if at all fortified, there would be some difficulty in extricating the garrisons both of the front

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line and of the right of the second line, and a large part of the Turkish army might be cut off from the Diyalah. Further, although the parapets of the trenches were low, the more important works were conspicuous and well above the ground ; but the defender must, as a rule, choose between concealment that affords protection, with a restricted field of fire, and command implying visibility but the power of sweeping all the approaches. Notwithstanding these disadvantages, the position, as has been pointed out, was formidable, for the approaches to the remainder of the first line and to the second line, which was on a slight rise in the ground, were quite open except for the presence of dry watercourses and some thin scrub, and the attacker could be deprived of such water as was drawn from channels issuing from the Diyalah. The light entrenchments which had apparently been made to the north-west of Yesi would serve to delay an attacking force, and their left was not more than about five miles from the line on the Diyalah.

At Kut-al-Amarah the Turkish commander had deployed the larger proportion of his force, and in doing so he had given General Townshend the opportunity of beating him in detail. Now, however, so far as the British were aware,[1] Nur-ud-Din Pasha was holding at least half of his troops in reserve ready for despatch to any locality where their pres-

[1] Actually the dispositions of the Turks were as follows : The left was watched by the Cavalry Brigade. At Kusaibah, in reserve, was the newly arrived 51st Division, its seven battalions comprising about 6,000 infantry, and it possessed eight field and six mountain guns. The 45th Division, some 6,500 infantry, held the left of the first line on the left bank, having one regiment, the 142nd, deployed, and twelve field guns, and there were two regiments in reserve at Yesi. The 38th Division, 3,000 rifles, occupied the remainder of the first line on the left bank, and had two regiments deployed, with eight field guns, but there was apparently a gap of half a mile between these troops and those of the 45th Division. One regiment of the 38th Division was in reserve near Salman Pak, and here there were four heavy guns. The 35th Division, about 4,000 rifles, was on the right bank, with four field and three heavy guns ; and, as before, one Arab brigade was on the right bank, and the other, with some camelmen, was in and round the trenches on the Diyalah ; and either here, or on the right bank, were the remaining field gun (one captured from the British in 1915), and the six remaining mountain guns. The cavalry were on the left bank.

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ence was required, or for the delivery of a staggering counter-attack should the British again follow the enveloping tactics employed on the 28th September.

Strategical conditions often, perhaps as a rule, chalk out the path that should be followed in tactics; and in this case the fact that large reinforcements were apparently on the way to the Turkish army indicated that the British should, if possible, gain a complete victory over the troops holding the position at Ctesiphon and that success should be obtained quickly. The outstanding advantage that is held by the attacker in battle is that he can profit by the presence of some weak point or can exploit some unguarded moment; and in doing so, he can force the enemy to follow his movements and devote energy to the weak expedient of parrying instead of to the delivery of blows. General Townshend's plan was calculated fully to utilise this advantage, and he proposed to make the physical difficulties subservient to his purpose, and to trust to these to hold the Turks to the southern portions of their positions. At the same time by pretence of following his former procedure of rolling up the enemy's left, he would endeavour to tempt the Turkish commander to deploy his reserves, and would then strike hard at what would, it was hoped, prove to be a feebly defended but vital point.

As with every plan, that of General Townshend was not without drawbacks, and, as is always the case, success would depend more on its vigorous and intelligent execution than on the intrinsic merit of the project. The commander of the 6th Division looked for a decisive success from the converging movements of a series of widely separated columns, so disposed as to reap to the fullest extent the moral and tactical advantages that may be obtained by striking at the enemy from two directions. A considerably larger margin had been allowed for error than in the battle of Kut-al-Amarah; but, even so, it appears that too much reliance was still placed on the exact and undisturbed accomplishment of the consecutive movements of the various

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columns, and that too little consideration was given to the possibility of accident due either to faults of execution or to the counter-measures that might be taken by the enemy. Further, unless victory were gained rapidly, the enemy would be able to bring troops from the right bank to support those on the left, for the former were only to be engaged by the guns of the armed vessels. The various columns were, so far as distance was concerned, probably within supporting range of one another as regards artillery fire; but, owing to the flatness of the ground and the constant presence of confusing mirage and dusty haze, it was at least doubtful whether close co-operation could be effected until the troops had advanced for some distance. It is true that a commander has generally to choose between the advantages offered by and the risks incurred in following a daring policy, and the less conclusive results, as regards either victory or defeat, that may be obtained by circumspection. But it must be pointed out that if, as actually happened, checks were experienced, the battle would resolve itself into a series of isolated and probably indecisive actions, even supposing that the British were not defeated in detail. In view of the possibility of this result, a leader does not, as a rule, adopt so bold a policy unless it is believed that his army possesses some outstanding advantage as regards *moral*, numbers, or armament over the enemy. General Townshend's troops held the superiority in the first and most important of these factors, and no doubt he counted on possessing it as regards the others. In respect of these, however, expectation proved unfortunately to be at fault.

Regarding the matter from another standpoint, it is well known that to study the characteristics of the enemy's troops and of their commander, to forecast the actions of his mind and to take liberties accordingly, is the highest part of leadership; and the volitions determining ordinary conduct are said to be so regular that prevision having a reasonable degree of probability should be possible. It might therefore certainly be argued from his conduct of

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the battle of Kut-al-Amarah that Nur-ud-Din would not display much ability and resolution in the management of this new contest. But it was a daring and brilliant, and as it turned out an accurate conjecture to assume, as General Townshend did, that he would at once tumble headlong into the trap that had been set for him ; and that he would forthwith commit the bulk or even the whole of his reserve to action so as to stem the turning attack, and thus leave Townshend free to carry V.P. and then sweep down the Turkish first line. If, however, the Turks did not do so, Townshend would be left without any troops with which to influence the course of the action. The enemy also would be given time in which to concentrate every man at the points that were being attacked, and a stalemate or even a repulse might ensue.

Apart from the strategical situation, it was, owing to the difficulties in regard to the supply of water for the attacking force, evidently most important that the British should quickly overrun the enemy's positions, and General Townshend's plans were formulated with this object. It is suggested, nevertheless, that it would probably have been better if General Townshend had arranged to hold his general reserve in hand until the course of the battle had more definitely declared itself, rather than launch it, as he apparently proposed, as soon as the Turks felt the pressure of the turning attack. Perhaps, also, it would have been more advantageous had General Townshend placed his headquarters with the reserve, where he would have been close to the areas where the decisive blows were to be struck, and in a better position as regards the supervision of his troops, rather than with the preparatory attack. It is true that telephonic communication was established between his headquarters and the various columns, but this might and probably would be interrupted during the battle, while owing to the mirage and dust no reliance could be placed on visual signalling.

Another of General Townshend's arrangements that seems

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open to criticism is the confiding of the very important turning attack to two independent leaders. It was judicious to enjoin on these officers " intimate co-operation and understanding and mutual support and unity of doctrine " ; but it would surely have been wiser to make the observance of these requisites certain by uniting the two groups under one commander.

General Townshend continued the system which he had previously used of calling the various columns by names specifically indicating their functions, and had definitely christened a locality as the " Vital Point." The British are reputed not to be an imaginative race, whatever may be the case with the various races of Indians in the force, and the fact that in the battle the capture of the vital point did not actually prove to be decisive may not have affected the confidence of the troops. But it is suggested that there is, on the whole, more to be lost than gained by the use of such picturesque nomenclature, and that drab dullness seems more appropriate than word painting in operation orders.

The troops allotted for the preparatory attack had moved for a short distance beyond Lajj on the morning of the 21st November, but the advance to the battlefield did not begin until 2.30 p.m., when Hoghton's column marched for about five miles along one of the routes to Baghdad towards Bustan, after which the troops moved to a small village on the bank of the Tigris for the purpose of obtaining water. At 9 p.m., when a start was again made, the night was dark, although later on the moon shone out. After advancing for about two and a half hours the column finally halted at its station, some two miles to the north-east of Bustan.

Meanwhile the remainder of the force had left Lajj between 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and moved slowly north-north-westwards on a bearing of 340°, the cavalry being on the right of the column. Delamain's troops reached their position of assembly at midnight, and halted behind some sandhills about three miles to the east of V.P. Scouts were then sent out both to ascertain the nature of a water channel

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which was shown on the maps that had been issued to the troops, and as to whether it would be possible to place men in it for purposes of concealment. At 2.30 a.m. the scouts returned without having located the water cut, but they brought a report that they had penetrated behind the enemy's first line, and had been in the vicinity of the V.P. redoubt. Orders were then issued for the men to entrench the ground on which they stood so as to provide cover against artillery fire, and this was completed by 4 a.m.

The units allotted to Hamilton's turning attack had, in the interval, moved on until about 1 a.m., halting under cover of some slight folds of the ground where the northern track leading to Baghdad, which they were following, crossed a dry canal; and at 3 a.m., when the night had become bitterly cold, the flying column, which had continued to march in a north-westerly direction, also halted.

Townshend's headquarters, where Sir John Nixon was present, were at this period near the troops of the preparatory attack, and here telephonic reports, sent over cable, were in due course received that the other three columns were in position; and except for the serious loss on the 20th and 21st of three of his small number of aeroplanes,[1] leaving only two that were fit to fly, all therefore had gone well.

Although the enemy, who believed that the British were 20,000 strong, were well informed of our movements, and were alarmed at the advance of the flying column, no action was taken. Leaving the two 5-inch land guns of the 86th Heavy Battery with an escort of the 17th Sappers and Miners, Hoghton's troops began, at about 6 a.m. on the 22nd November, to move cautiously forward for the delivery of the preparatory attack, the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, who were in two lines, being on the right, the 119th on the left; the 22nd Punjabis and the 48th

[1] One of these airmen had, it is stated in the Turkish account, at the time of his capture, ascertained that seven battalions and the artillery of a new division (the 51st) had reached the front and were near Kusaibah; and the enemy also made use of the map which he was carrying, as they had none of their own.

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Pioneers were in support, and the 76th Field Battery and two companies of the 103rd followed behind.

The sun rose half an hour later and drew up a thick mist from the river, but, in spite of this, the *Firefly* was able to open fire, followed by the 5-inch land guns and the 18-pounders of the 76th Battery, while the infantry felt their way over open ground covered with barley stubble. The Turks made no reply, our guns ceased firing, and at 8 a.m., when the fog suddenly rolled away, the troops found themselves between two and three miles from and to the east of the arch of Ctesiphon, and apparently a mile or more from the Turkish entrenchments. But they were some distance to the south of the localities which they had been ordered to attack.

Hoghton was naturally disinclined to advance without clearing up the situation, and the men were ordered to take cover in a dry water-course and to stand fast while scouts were sent forward, and the field guns, and later the heavy guns also, were brought nearer to the infantry. This delay, the first failure of adjustment, was somewhat disconcerting to General Townshend, and, as matters turned out, was most serious, for the Turks, who were now fully aware of the presence of a large force on their northern flank, where it seems that there was little or no mist, were given time in which to meet the new situation.

Meanwhile Hamilton's men, who had been waiting on the movements of those with the preparatory attack, had observed a body of Turks, estimated as comprising three battalions and two batteries, moving into their position from the direction of Ctesiphon. These apparently were the reserves of the 45th Division, for, according to Muhammad Amin's account, the greater part of the two regiments forming its reserve was sent forward, when Hoghton's guns opened fire, into the open to the north-west of V.P., but about two companies were also despatched directly to this locality.

At 7.45 a.m. Hamilton became impatient and reported

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to Townshend that there were no sounds of action on the part of the preparatory attack. In order not to lose the benefit of the surprise which had apparently been inflicted on the enemy, he also enquired whether his column should advance. Townshend at once replied in the affirmative, and as a result the troops both of the turning attack and flying column went forward between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. The former moved on Kusaibah and towards the Yesi mound at the left of the main portion of the second Turkish line, with the Norfolks on the right, the 110th on the left; then came the 120th and three companies of the 7th Rajputs, with the 76th Battery in close support on their left. One company of the 7th and half of the 22nd Sappers and Miners were left to escort the three sections of Field Ambulances. The cavalry marched in the direction of the arch of Ctesiphon in echelon of regiments from the left, the 7th Lancers leading, then the 16th Cavalry, and lastly the 33rd; the infantry, two sections of horse artillery, the machine guns, and armoured cars were on the left of the cavalry, and the remaining section of horse artillery on the right of the brigade. The transport, ambulance, and pack wireless station remained behind. At about 8.30 a.m. Hoghton also began to advance; and possibly because the arch was a well-defined object, the troops continued to move towards it.

The British cavalry first came into contact with the weak Turkish cavalry brigade, which fell back in a north-westerly direction, but soon a large force of Arabs swooped down on the transport, ambulance, and pack wireless station, and the 33rd were sent to drive them off, which they did with the support of the fire of two horse-artillery guns. It appears that steps had not been taken definitely to locate the enemy's troops and trenches by means of scouts, and the usual and disconcerting mirage now came on. As a result, and also because of the presence of scrub, the leading units of the cavalry shortly afterwards suddenly found themselves under the close fire of one or more bat-

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talions, with some machine guns, that were in trenches or the dry channels with which the whole area was furrowed, and were supported by a couple of guns. These battalions were probably the advanced troops of the 51st Division, of which five battalions with four machine guns and one field and the mountain battery had moved forward from Kusaibah in two groups to meet the flying column and turning attack; the left group consisted of two battalions, some machine guns, and two mountain guns. A good many casualties resulted from the enemy's fire, particularly in the British Machine-Gun Battery, but, after falling back for some distance, the cavalrymen dismounted and lined the crest of a gentle rise, and eventually the 76th, with the support of S Battery, forced the Turks to retire to another locality. The dismounted cavalry and 76th then moved forward, but were arrested by fire at about 10 a.m. A sharp exchange of musketry and gun fire now continued until about 11.30 a.m., and as there seemed to be but little prospect of evicting the Turks by direct attack, Melliss then ordered the cavalry to return to their horses, mount, and with S Battery march in a north-westerly direction so as to outflank and get behind the enemy's position, leaving the 76th to cover the movement.

While these events had been taking place, it appears that the advance of the reserve regiments of the 45th Division, the 3rd and 141st, to meet the turning group, and possibly also the retirement of personnel and transport from V.P., which was being strongly shelled, were observed by Delamain and by Townshend. It seems that, on account of the mirage, both officers were mistaken as to what was taking place, but when, at about 8.30 a.m., Delamain asked for permission to advance as the enemy were in full retreat, Townshend decided to put in his general reserve.

Delamain had already divided his infantry into two groups, placing the 66th, who had recently been substituted for the 20th Punjabis, the 117th, the 2/7th Gurkhas, and half of the 24th, some 2,200 rifles in all, under Colonel

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Climo, and holding the Dorsets and the 104th as a reserve under his own hands. Orders preparatory to the attack had been issued at 7.30 a.m., and, in explaining them to his battalion commanders, Climo had laid great stress on the necessity of driving it home at the greatest possible speed, reliance for covering fire being placed on the artillery and machine guns.

As soon as the message from General Townshend was received, Climo was ordered to advance. His units then left their cover in lines of small columns on a frontage of 600 yards, the 24th being on the right and the 2/7th Gurkhas on the left, while the 66th and the 117th came 600 yards behind them. The Dorsets and 104th followed at first as reserve, but afterwards for a time were sent towards Hamilton's group. The troops did not come under gun fire until they had marched for quite 3,000 yards, for the enemy's guns were at some distance behind the first line, and the Turks reserved the fire of their rifles and machine guns until our infantry were within 1,000 yards from the trenches, at which point the attacking units shook out in succession into extended order. Half a battalion was now detailed to keep down the musketry from the trenches to the south of V.P.; the massed machine guns of the battalions swept the ground to the north-west of it, and the guns and howitzers smothered the work itself with shells. Keeping strictly to the letter of their orders, the rest of the infantry advanced, without firing, by rushes of one hundred yards, and, in spite of the losses caused by the enemy's very heavy and effective fire, they drove forward until the wire entanglements were reached forty yards from the work. Rifles were then, at last, brought into play as the men forced their way through the wire. The Turks held out to the end, but could not resist the vigour of the assault, and finally the whole of the garrison were killed or captured, the time occupied in the advance over a distance of from 5,000 to 6,000 yards, and the assault, being no more than seventy minutes.

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Two companies of Dorsets came up either just before or shortly after the assault, and with Climos' men lined the faces of the redoubt and commenced firing into the trenches lying to the south of it and into dry channels to the north-west which were being held by the Turks. As a result, at about 10.15 a.m., some of the enemy, the residue of the 142nd Regiment, broke cover from the trenches to the south of the work, as did also a large part of the 3rd Regiment and portions of the 141st from the ground to the north-west; and the whole then hurried off under the devastating fire of our infantry and machine guns, which was continued until the enemy were more than 1,000 yards away. At this juncture, Townshend, who had heard of Delamain's success from an airman, galloped with his staff to V.P., coming under heavy artillery fire, probably from a battery of the 38th Division near the Water redoubt, as they went.

General Townshend had every reason to be satisfied with the course of the battle up to this time, although the 16th and 30th Brigades had suffered serious losses in advancing over the featureless ground against the enemy's entrenchments; but now there came a change in the situation. After moving for about half a mile through thin scrub, Hoghton's infantry had entered a zone where the bushes had been burnt, but luckily where the ground was much intersected with dry ditches and small mounds that probably marked the site of a portion of Ctesiphon; and now heavy fire from rifles and machine guns was opened at effective ranges from the direction of High Wall as well as from the front, and big guns also commenced to fire from the southern portion of the enemy's positions. As a result the 119th inclined towards the High Wall, but the brigade in general went forward. Hoghton's troops soon found themselves so hotly engaged at ranges of from 1,000 to 1,500 yards, apparently with the 112th Regiment of the 38th Division and three or four machine guns at High Wall, that, at about 10.45 a.m., he sent a message to

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Townshend's headquarters that the principal mass had advanced too far before the 17th Infantry Brigade had had time to clear away the troops in front of it.

When this message came in, Climo was engaged in reforming his troops, but two companies of the Dorsets, two of the 2/7th Gurkhas, two of the 117th and half of the 22nd Sappers and Miners had been sent off to clear the enemy's trenches and establish touch with Hoghton. Delamain had arrived at V.P. with the remainder of the Dorsets and the 104th ; and two of the batteries of the 45 Division, which had apparently been abandoned by the enemy, could be made out at what seemed in the mirage to be a distance of about a mile away to the west and north-west of V.P. Against these guns the remainder of the Dorsets, 2/7th Gurkhas, and 117th advanced under Climo, supported by portions of the 24th, 66th, and 104th, and covered by the fire of the guns of the principal mass, which had come up to V.P.

General Townshend was now in the thick of the fight, was perhaps unduly influenced by the events that were taking place under his own eyes, and therefore possibly thought that the men of the preparatory attack must ere this have reached the enemy's position ; or he may merely have considered that Hoghton's troops had been drawn too much towards High Wall, and desired to bring the brigade on to the alignment against which it had been ordered to advance. Whatever the reason, he, however, sent orders at this juncture, and apparently by messenger, to Hoghton to bring up the left shoulders of his units and move towards V.P. so as completely to envelop the Turkish force that still remained to the south of it. Hoghton, therefore, was placed in one of those cruel dilemmas that are so common in war, for to have disobeyed might have ruined the plans of his superior, whilst implicit obedience might involve his men in very serious loss. Hoghton decided to obey and to trust to the flotilla to check any attempts by the Turks to advance to the Tigris ; and directions were consequently

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sent out to the troops that they were to move at right angles to their present line of advance.

Leaving their machine guns and a few groups of men to cover the movement, and then follow as best they could, the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry led the way, marching straight across the enemy's front for a mile or more and at a distance of from 1,000 yards to 1,500 yards from their trenches. The ground was "absolutely flat desert without a blade of cover, for all the grass and bushes had been burnt, and against this background the khaki figures stood out as clearly as bull's-eyes on the rifle range." The 119th, whose left was then about 700 yards from the High Wall, followed and eventually inclined to the right of the leading battalion, and the other units also went northwards, moving parallel with the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. It seems, however, that the guns for the time being kept on firing to cover the movements of the infantry, but owing to the mirage could no longer accurately locate the enemy's positions.

Of all operations a flank march under fire is the most trying to troops, for while they cannot engage the enemy's forces, these are afforded an easy target whose range, moreover, continues to be constant or nearly so. In addition, such a march can readily be checked by means of a counter-attack, as troops so attacked must, for their own safety, at once face towards it. The mirage perhaps to some extent shrouded the movements of the battalions that were farther from the trenches, so that the enemy may not have grasped what was being undertaken by the British; but, whatever the cause, the Turks made no attempt to issue from their positions and deliver an attack, and contented themselves with fire action. As a result, although our losses were heavy, the troops did in the end fight their way to the cover of an irrigation channel some 200 yards from the trenches near what was subsequently known to us as the Water redoubt—so called because of the existence of the irrigation channel, containing water pumped up from the Tigris near

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Salman Pak, that was behind it. But the units of the 17th Brigade had become much intermingled, all reserves had been absorbed into the firing line, and the attack, therefore, was for the moment brought to a standstill.

Help, however, was now at hand, for during this action one and a half companies of the Dorsetshire Regiment had occupied the works to the south of V.P., while the other half company with the Sappers and Miners moved down the enemy's trenches, supported by the men of the 2/7th Gurkhas. The advance of these troops was not opposed, partly because of the interval that had existed between the 45th and 38th Divisions, and in part because two companies that had been sent from the reserve of the latter to stop them were routed by gun fire. The resistance of the troops in the Water redoubt was therefore soon shaken by the advance of the British from the north, and, with the assistance of the 1/5th Hampshire Howitzer Battery, which came down from V.P., the work was carried by the 17th Brigade at about 11.30 a.m., the bulk of the enemy in this area falling back westwards. The Turks also abandoned two batteries, a fact of which the British, however, were not aware. After this success Hoghton re-formed the battalions. He then placed the two companies of the 2/7th Gurkhas in the Water redoubt, and also sent some of his troops southwards to clear the trenches in the vicinity of the High Wall, which were consequently evacuated by a number of Turks, who retired in disorder and seem to have carried with them the four heavy guns at Salman Pak.

While the attack on the Water redoubt was in progress the men under Climo had, in spite of resistance on the part of the enemy, advanced for some distance towards the second Turkish line, capturing a number of prisoners and the two batteries, three guns of which were intact but the remainder without breech blocks. The British units then began to entrench the ground which they had won.

The troops under Hamilton had, during these actions, advanced for three-quarters of a mile without meeting

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with opposition, but had then come under rifle fire from a line of low scrub 500 or 600 yards away, where the enemy, probably part of the 45th Division, were holding some hastily constructed cover. After taking these positions at 11 a.m., the brigade moved forward for half a mile, but was then met by a violent fire from rifles and machine guns. Hamilton's battalions were now only able to gain ground slowly, and although the 110th, who had suffered serious losses, were reinforced by the three companies of the 7th Rajputs, the troops were finally stopped at about 1 p.m. on ground which was too hard to admit of entrenchment and at some distance from Climo's right.

The cavalry also had at about noon been forced by the advance of 2,000 Turks, portions of the 51st Division, who were supported by a swarm of Arabs, to fall back to some mounds lying close to the northern route to Baghdad, and nearly due north of the arch of Ctesiphon, and here they held their ground for some time. Meanwhile, on the other flank, the enemy's guns on the right bank had checked the advance of our armed vessels, which were much hampered by the difficulty of so laying their guns that if the shells cleared the banks of the river they did not fall far beyond their target.

It seems that Sir John Nixon and his staff joined Townshend at about noon, and at once came under heavy artillery fire, which was opened by the enemy to cover the reorganisation of the 45th and 38th Divisions, and to prepare for a series of counter-attacks that were about to be delivered against the positions that had been occupied by the units under Climo. In view of the situation the withdrawal of headquarters from, rather than a movement to, the front would, therefore, have been desirable. For some hours, indeed, not only the positions of Climo's men but the whole area as far back as V.P. were systematically searched by artillery fire from the west and south.

Climo had now in hand a reserve which he had formed out of men of the 66th, and at Delamain's request he had sent

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back to him two companies of the 24th; but with the exception of the one and a half companies of the Dorsets that were in the works to the south of V.P., and the units of Hoghton's brigade, or with him, that were still in the Turkish front line, it seems that every other man of these brigades was in the fight. At about 1 p.m. Climo, who had gone into the front line to look personally at the situation, observed a body of the enemy, consisting possibly of one regiment and one field battery of the 35th Division which had been withdrawn from the right bank of the Tigris, in movement near Kusaibah; and he at once sent his slender reserve with some machine guns to protect his left. Half an hour later a number of Turks, comprising probably the two remaining battalions and battery of the 51st Division, advanced slowly from the south-west covered by powerful gun fire and halting frequently to shoot. This advance was made apparently with the object of checking the British, and, as with the fire of the Turkish artillery, giving the 45th Division time to rally and re-form. Owing to shortage of ammunition, Climo ordered his infantry to withhold their fire; but our artillery, which was in action near V.P., and the machine guns, caused heavy losses to the enemy, and the advance was abandoned, but not before Climo had unfortunately been disabled.

One British aeroplane had been lost during the battle, but one other and a seaplane were still in action, and, in the course of a reconnaissance carried out at about 3 p.m., it was ascertained that the enemy's bridge had been dismantled, that 1,000 men, probably portions of the 38th Division, were retiring towards Kusaibah, and that 2,000 troops were in the dry channel near this village. These were possibly four battalions and the machine-gun company of the 35th Division, as two more of its battalions and the machine guns had now crossed the Tigris, while, as stated below, one battalion and the battery of the units which had come over the river earlier in the day had been thrown into the fight. It was also observed that transport was

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moving towards the Diyalah, and that the trenches on this river were held by infantry, who were in all likelihood the two remaining battalions of the 51st Division, which had just arrived on the field.

Whether this encouraging report reached General Townshend is not certain, but he soon had serious matters demanding his attention. During and after the first Turkish counter-attack numbers of wounded had been drifting back towards V.P., but worse still, many of them were accompanied by unwounded comrades. Battle is a most powerful winnower, and unless supported by the strong bond of discipline, which alone can lend the necessary cohesion to troops, the weakness of human nature will, in many cases, inevitably assert itself when men are under fire; and no more specious plea can be offered to the wavering mind than that it was the instinct of humanity which induced the individual to seek the path of safety in assisting a wounded comrade. Townshend's troops had fought and did fight most courageously; but heavy losses had been sustained at Kut-al-Amarah, and the drafts sent to replace them had arrived so recently that time had not been available for these soldiers to learn that spirit of obedience which, in the opinion of Napoleon, counts in war before every other qualification, even before bravery.

Just when, between 3 p.m. and 3.30 p.m., some of the troops were showing this lack of cohesion, the Turks advanced again and were now estimated by the British as being 7,000 strong. This force was composed of the two battalions and field battery of the 51st Division, which had not moved against the turning attack and flying column; one battalion and the battery of the 35th Division which had come over from the right bank during the morning; and such portions of the 45th Division as had now been rallied. The orders for this counter-attack had, it may be noted, been issued at 1.30 p.m., but, owing to the lack of means of communication, it did not take place until about two hours later. At first the much diminished force of the British held firm, but,

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in spite of the efforts of the Dorsets, assisted by men of the 2/7th Gurkhas and 117th Royal Mahrattas, and of the effective fire of our guns in the neighbourhood of V.P., the troops on the left began to falter. And now, says General Townshend, there were " hundreds of Indian soldiers streaming to the rear because there were not enough white officers to keep them steady and in hand." By utilising his staff and that of the Commander-in-Chief also, Townshend contrived to rally the men, who were led back to the front. But the pressure of numbers proved to be too great, ammunition was running very short, for most of the mules carrying it had been hit by the enemy's searching fire, and the rest of the line began to give ground, the eight Turkish guns being abandoned.

The battle now swayed backwards and forwards indecisively. Hoghton's men and the one and a half companies of the Dorsets were sent against the right of the Turkish force and delivered more than one effective attack; and, with the help of the artillery near V.P. which had been reinforced by the land section of the 86th Heavy Battery, the British regained the enemy's guns on no fewer than three occasions, Delamain, who had assumed command, being for a time with his foremost troops, but they were as often driven back again. In the end the men were able to hold fast about 400 yards from the guns, and in the dusk they were withdrawn to the Turkish first line unmolested except for occasional gun fire, for the enemy also were now exhausted. A battalion of Turks, probably part of the 38th Division which had been sent forward to cover the removal of the two field batteries that had been abandoned by its units but had not been seen by the British, however, then advanced and began to entrench about 1,300 yards from the Water redoubt, where Delamain was now in command. He asked, therefore, for the support of artillery, and the 82nd Field Battery and 1/5th Hampshire Howitzer Battery were sent to him together with two companies of the 2/7th Gurkhas.

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During this crisis of the battle the cavalry had been forced, at about 1.30 p.m., again to withdraw towards the 18th Infantry Brigade, owing to the menacing advance of the Turkish cavalry brigade and 2,000 Arabs against their right; but here, with the assistance of a company of the 120th detached from the 18th Brigade, they steadily maintained their position, checking the horsemen and helping to hold off the infantry of the Turkish 51st Division also. At about 4 p.m., when the Turkish troops had become closely engaged with the 76th Punjabis, the 16th and 33rd Cavalry and two sections of S Battery mounted and moved southwards against the enemy's right; but, owing to the fact that the ground was covered with a network of small irrigation channels, a charge was not practicable, and the action became stationary.

Hamilton's column, which had, meanwhile, probably been opposed by part of the 51st Division as well as by one or more battalions of the 45th Division, had firmly held its ground; but the brigade reserve now consisted only of two companies of the 120th and the half company of the 22nd Sappers and Miners which had been brought up to the front. At about 4.30 p.m., in response to a suggestion from Major-General Kemball, who had, it seems, ridden over from V.P. after assisting to rally the men of the principal mass, Hamilton attempted to give a forward impulse to the firing line by putting in the whole of his reserve, with the exception of half a company which was left with the guns. These troops advanced towards the right of the Norfolks, but were received with heavy fire, and before much ground had been gained the enemy began to press the brigade on both flanks, and the battalions again could do no more than hold their positions. Orders came in at 5 p.m that the fight was to be discontinued and that the men of the turning attack were to move to V.P. The withdrawal was carried out in the dusk and after nightfall without hindrance from the Turks, who, it appears, also fell back; and the last of the troops reached the *rendezvous* at 11.30 p.m., followed

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by the 76th Punjabis, the cavalry having already joined the main body of Townshend's force.

General Townshend at first contemplated the resumption of the offensive on the 23rd, and issued orders for the units under Hoghton to instal themselves near V.P., those under Hamilton to prolong the line southwards, while the group under Delamain was to hold the entrenchments towards the Tigris. At the same time a request was made to the Senior Naval Officer to bring his ships, which had not been able to master the fire of the enemy's heavy battery on the right bank up to a level with the left of the force. In addition, directions were sent that rations for the 23rd were to be sent forward by the Supply Column from Lajj.

On ascertaining that, what between casualties and stragglers, Delamain could muster only 1,000 men, Hoghton 700, and Hamilton between 800 and 900, tentative directions were issued by Townshend for the force to be reorganised as soon as possible. When this had been completed, it was contemplated that the division should move to and occupy the trenches of the enemy's first line in the vicinity of the Tigris, so as to water the men and animals, replenish ammunition, obtain food, and evacuate the wounded, who had, as far as was possible, been collected near the V.P. redoubt.

The situation of the British was now unquestionably serious. Their casualties had been heavy, amounting to about 4,500 men, of whom not fewer than 3,500 were wounded, and the bulk of the losses had necessarily fallen on the infantry, who were then and are still the essential arm. A number of cavalry horses and transport animals had also been disabled. The troops were hundreds of miles from the sea, their communications, which were infested by treacherous tribesmen, were but weakly guarded, and the first of the promised reinforcements could not land in Mesopotamia for some time. The outlook, therefore, was grave enough to shake the strongest nerves; but courage soon discovers the resources of even the most desperate situation, and Townshend, reflecting that his troops had

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taken about 1,200 prisoners, and that they had probably inflicted on the enemy losses far greater than those they had themselves experienced, resolved to stand firm. His resolution came near to being deservedly rewarded, for the Turks were also in a serious plight. As they themselves admit, the 38th and 45th Divisions had been "crushed and were in evil case, and our saviours the 51st Division had lost heavily. . . . The units of the 35th Division brought over to the left bank in driblets had played no effective part, and the counter-attacks destined to recover the line of defence had had no real success." After some hesitation on the part of Nur-ud-Din, orders, however, were issued at 9 p.m. that, "in the event of its being impossible to occupy the first line without fighting, the troops will retire to the second line." In addition, as the divisional grouping had been found to be unwieldy, the army was now organised into two corps, a 13th Corps being formed of the 35th and 38th Divisions and an 18th of the 45th and 51st Divisions.

The night of the 22/23rd November, which was very cold, passed without any further attempts on the part of the Turks, who had retired to their second line and were busy with their own reorganisation. The British, therefore, were able also to reorganise as well as the now serious shortage of officers would permit, and to bring many more of the wounded to the collecting-station which had been formed near V.P., on the springless transport carts.

At 7.30 a.m. on the 23rd Sir John Nixon, who had remained all night at V.P., himself ordered a squadron of the 7th Lancers to move out to the north and west and ascertain whether the second Turkish line was still occupied. The squadron came under heavy fire at first, but, after falling back to the bivouac near V.P., rode southwards in the space between the two lines of entrenchments as far as the Tigris without drawing fire. The inference from this reconnaissance was that the right of the position on the northern bank of the Tigris had been evacuated. This supposition was not correct, but it was confirmed by the report of an

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airman,[1] who brought news that the enemy had withdrawn from the right of the second line, that only one or two Turkish battalions were in the position, and that these were busy collecting wounded. It was also observed that the bridge of boats had been removed, and that the enemy were hastily improving the trenches that had been constructed behind the Diyalah. It looked, then, as if the British would at any rate be able to maintain their present positions pending the arrival of reinforcements. Actually the dispositions of the Turks are said to have been as follows: The 38th and the portions of the 35th Division that had crossed the Tigris were behind the right of the second line and facing Salman Pak. Then came the 45th Division with two battalions of the 51st Division. The latter, which had been joined during the night by the two remaining battalions, was in the portion of the second line near and to the north-west of Yesi with the cavalry on its left, and the Arabs were in and about the entrenchments on the Diyalah.

Water is perhaps the most important of all the material things that are necessary for the maintenance of life, but water is heavy and difficult of transportation, so that men and animals in the field must as a rule go to water instead of having it brought over long distances to them. Some such motive appears to have governed the decisions of General Townshend on the 23rd, for although water was coming down the channel to the Water redoubt, the source, so far as the British were aware, was in the hands of the Turks, and reliance could not be placed on the continuation of the supply. Townshend resolved, therefore, to carry out the movement that had been contemplated overnight, in order to be within easy reach of water, to facilitate the evacuation of our wounded, and to cover the establishment of a bridge of boats at Bustan, the bridge at Lajj having, on the 22nd, been already once dismantled and then again reconstructed there as a result of the changing fortunes of the battle.

[1] Atmospheric conditions and engine trouble often made observation exceedingly difficult.

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At 8.45 a.m., accordingly, the flying column was broken up and the Cavalry Brigade, under Brigadier-General H. L. Roberts, was sent to Ctesiphon. Its function was to co-operate with the 2/7th Gurkhas, one company of the 24th Punjabis, the Machine Gun Battery, and a section of the 82nd Field Battery that had already been despatched in this direction for the purpose of covering the movement of the remainder; at the same time the cavalry were to ascertain what facilities existed for obtaining water from the Tigris.

The Cavalry Brigade marched first to High Wall, and then proceeded to the arch of Ctesiphon, which was gained at 10.15 a.m. without opposition. After a mound lying about 400 yards to the south of the arch had been occupied by the Gurkhas and field guns, the cavalry moved to the bank of the river, sending a covering force forward to a line of low sandhills that ran from the Tigris towards Salman Pak. A few shells were now fired by the horse artillery at a troop of Arabs which was moving on the right bank of the Tigris 1,100 yards away, and this action drew rifle fire from the southern portion of the enemy's second position on the left bank, near which Turkish cavalry could also now be seen watering their horses. The two British field guns therefore opened fire, and Turkish artillery came into action on both banks of the Tigris. As a result our armed vessels were driven back from Bustan, the cavalry were obliged to move their horses to the cover of the great arch, and a reinforcement of dismounted men was sent with the guns of the horse artillery to the sandhills.

During the morning the fire of Turkish marksmen from the right bank of the Tigris made it impossible for the horses to be watered except a few at a time. As there were also signs that the Turks were massing troops in their second position, the Indian cavalrymen began, at 1.30 p.m., to dribble back from the sandhills to their horses, and the horse artillery guns were withdrawn. No doubt a strong wind that had been blowing up clouds of dust throughout

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the day facilitated this movement, and it was completed with comparatively little loss in spite of the enemy's gun fire and musketry, which were now of considerable volume. Between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. an attempt by Turkish infantry of the 38th Division to advance from their positions was summarily stopped by the fire of the two field and horse artillery guns. About an hour later the Cavalry Brigade fell back just before sunset—that is at about 5 p.m.—unmolested to High Wall; but as the two field guns were being moved off soon afterwards, they were nearly captured by a body of Turkish cavalry, which suddenly appeared from behind the arch, but were forced to turn back by the fire of the Gurkhas.

While this skirmishing had been in progress, the reorganisation of the other units of Townshend's force and the collection of wounded had been continued, under the somewhat difficult conditions of the dust-storm which, while concealing the movements of the enemy, had, however, also the advantage of covering those of the British. It seems to have been considered that some of the troops were still under the influence of the ordeal they had undergone on the 22nd, for Sir John Nixon mentioned in a telegram which was sent to India that he had found it necessary to tell them that a reinforcement of two divisions was being sent to the front. He also informed the authorities in India that it was most urgent that these divisions should be despatched by units, as they became available, and with the greatest expedition. In a further communication it was stated that, according to the information which had been extracted from our prisoners, four Turkish divisions, the 35th, 38th, 45th, and 51st, had been present in the action, their total strength being subsequently estimated as 18,000 fighting men with 38 guns. It was also believed that one or two additional divisions were expected shortly to arrive from Mosul and one from Syria.

The main body of the British was not disturbed during the morning, for it was not until 1.30 p.m. that Nur-ud-Din,

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who had learnt that no British troops were to the north of V.P., and was perhaps encouraged[1] by our inactivity, issued orders for the delivery of a counter-attack. Soon after 3 p.m. Hamilton's Brigade, with the remainder of the 82nd Field Battery, marched off to the High Wall, a right-angled bank of steep earth 40 feet high in places, the western arm of which was 600 yards in length and the northern 400 yards. On his way, however, Hamilton was obliged to detach the Norfolks, who went into the Water redoubt, and the 120th, who formed on their left, to Delamain, whose brigade was now being menaced. After reaching High Wall the 7th Rajputs occupied its southern portion and the 110th went into the redoubt in the Turkish trenches near the angle of the Wall.

Not long afterwards it became increasingly evident to the British that the enemy would soon adopt the offensive, and as it seemed that they were about to attack the right at V.P., the order went out that all wounded who could walk or ride were to make their way to Lajj, while transport carts and some ambulances were hurried up for the more serious cases. These carts began to arrive at about 4 p.m., just when the Turks commenced to pour shells on V.P. and the Water redoubt, the latter being also in part flooded by water which apparently was again being pumped by the enemy into the irrigation channels. As a result of the cannonade the greater part of the animals bolted, the few ambulances were sent away, and most of those who had been seriously wounded remained in the collecting-station behind V.P. or in the trenches in its vicinity and near the Water redoubt.

General Townshend's fighting force was now distributed as follows: Hoghton's 17th Brigade, 1,200 strong, was at and near V.P. and was supported by the 76th Field Battery,

[1] It has been stated, but not by Muhammad Amin, that Khalil, the commander of the 51st Division, who had remained in Baghdad owing to sickness, now came to the front and urged Nur-ud-Din to deliver an attack.

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and the two land guns of the 86th Heavy Battery, which had been moved towards High Wall but had been recalled when the attack became imminent. The 76th Punjabis were in the trenches between Hoghton and Delamain, who, with the 16th Infantry Brigade, half of the 24th Punjabis, the Norfolks, and the 120th, was holding a long frontage at and near the Water redoubt, with the assistance of the 63rd Field Battery and the 1/5th Hampshire Howitzer Battery. Hamilton was at High Wall and the trenches in its vicinity with the 110th, the 7th Rajputs, and the 82nd Field Battery. The Cavalry Brigade, the bulk of the first-line transport, and some of the wounded were in the eastern end of the High Wall rectangle, and the 2/7th Gurkhas and Punjabis were still occupying the mound near the arch. General Townshend's headquarters were at the Water redoubt, and those of Sir John Nixon had been moved about a mile farther back and nearer to the Tigris.

As on the 22nd, the orders which had been issued by Nur-ud-Din were, owing to lack of means of communication, some time in reaching the Turkish troops. It had been intended that the attack should commence at 2.30 p.m. While the cavalry secured the left, the 51st Division, which, as stated above, had been joined by the two battalions of its 44th Regiment, but was still without those which had made the counter-attack on the afternoon of the 22nd, and the 45th Division, still stiffened by these last-mentioned battalions, were to have attacked the Water redoubt and the trenches to the north of it, the former also enveloping V.P.; and the 13th Corps (less the units on the right bank) was to have advanced against the entrenchments between the Water redoubt and the High Wall. The latter corps began its advance, as has been related, in somewhat hesitating fashion at about 3 p.m., the 35th Division being on the right with its right on the river. The 38th, which was stopped by the fire of our field and horse guns, did not rally until nightfall, but the main body of the 35th reached the vicinity of Salman Pak

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at 5 p.m., and then attempted in the dusk and after nightfall to capture the mound which was being held by the Gurkhas and Punjabis. The vigorous resistance offered by this group with the help afforded by our artillery quite broke up the attack of the 35th Division, and, after long and vain efforts to capture the mound, five companies and the machine-gun company were eventually left to mask the Gurkhas while the rest moved in several small columns against the trenches near High Wall. As the enemy approached these, the British lighted red and blue flares, and with their assistance the attack was quickly shattered by our fire, and the Turks fell back in disorder to Salman Pak, carrying with them the troops who were besieging the Gurkhas. During the night two regiments of the 38th Division also went forward, and apparently reached and occupied a lightly held portion of the British line until they were expelled by the bombers of the Dorsets. The 45th Division advanced slowly at about 3 p.m., but did not come within rifle range of V.P. and its neighbourhood until about two hours later; and the first attacks were therefore begun in the twilight. Two attempts to deliver an assault were made before the Turks drew off some time after midnight, and although these were not pressed home, Hoghton was forced to expend such quantities of ammunition that, at about 11 p.m., a squadron of the 33rd Cavalry was sent to Lajj to bring up a fresh supply. This was successfully effected and the carts reached High Wall at about 3 a.m. Meanwhile Hoghton had reported, at 2 a.m., that the attacks had ceased, and when the ammunition came to hand it was safely delivered at V.P.

The most serious anxiety was apparently caused to the British by the two detached battalions of the 51st Division, who were moving on the right of the 45th. These are said to have stormed forwards at least six times against the trenches near the Water redoubt, but in the end experienced a bloody repulse. The rest of the 51st Division took no part in the fight, for, as so often happened to troops

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on both sides in this campaign, the division lost its way and eventually ascertained after midnight that the 45th Division had withdrawn. The commander of the 51st then reported at 3.30 a.m. to the Turkish commander-in-chief, that he also was falling back to the second line.

The Gurkhas withdrew at daybreak on the 24th from the mound which they had so gallantly defended, leaving the ground littered with Turkish dead. Similar sights were seen in front of the centre of the line and V.P., but the losses of the British had been only 82. While the enemy had fallen or were still struggling back to their second line at other points, some of their troops, apparently 150 men of the 142nd Regiment of the 45th Division, who had not received the order to retire and had been left behind, were, however, still to the west of V.P. in a trench or irrigation channel, and from this a desultory fire was maintained. The British were unaware as to the smallness of this enemy force, and the men, therefore, were able to remain in their position during the 24th and to retire at nightfall. The heavy guns on the right bank of the Tigris also fired ineffectively during the day into the camps at High Wall, but they forced the armed ships, which had steamed to Bustan, again to drop back down river.

There were now three British aeroplanes in action, and during the forenoon the reports of the airmen indicated that the enemy, although holding the second line, were engaged in withdrawing to the Diyalah. In actual fact the orders for withdrawal were not issued until after midnight on the 24/25th, so that, as was the case with the enemy a little later in the day, the British were probably misled by the movements of transport and wounded. The weakened state of the 6th Division, however, prevented Townshend from calling on his men for further efforts against the now evidently superior numbers of the enemy, and his first care was the concentration of his force, the replenishment of food and ammunition, and the evacuation of wounded; and all these could best be effected by closing towards the

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Tigris, where the supply of water, which was so difficult at V.P., would also be facilitated. To cover these movements our artillery fired from time to time and occasionally drew return fire from the enemy. The Cavalry Brigade, less one squadron of the 16th which was engaged in escorting wounded to Lajj, also marched out at 7 a.m. to the sandhills lying to the north-east of V.P., and here the regiments remained all day in observation of the enemy's cavalry and a body of Arabs that could be seen in the distance.

Meanwhile the troops under Delamain proceeded to High Wall and occupied the northern face, while those under Hamilton held the western. In the afternoon four aeroplanes which had become available made flights, and during one of these bombs were dropped on a body of the enemy, estimated to be 4,000 strong, which was observed to be near the junction of the Diyalah with the Tigris. The information that had been obtained in the morning was confirmed, but the presence of 2,000 of the enemy, the residue of the 35th Division which had not crossed the Tigris, was still noted on the right bank of the river, although there were no signs of a bridge at Kusaibah. Hoghton's Brigade was unable to leave V.P. until the evacuation of the wounded had been completed, which occupied the whole day; and in order to be at hand to assist him to get clear, should his brigade be attacked, the 16th and 18th Brigades advanced under Delamain, in the afternoon in two brigade masses of battalions moving to a flank in fours almost to V.P. The 76th Punjabis and the 76th Field Battery were the last to leave this locality, and they finally quitted the neighbourhood of the work at 4 p.m., but the 16th and 18th Brigades did not withdraw until after darkness had set in.

This movement towards V.P. caused great alarm to the enemy. After the failure of the Turkish counter-attack, Nur-ud-Din had, at 11 a.m., telegraphed to "the Acting Commander-in-Chief through the Aleppo office to His Excellency Goltz Pasha" in somewhat lugubrious vein, for the Turks, besides being repulsed, had suffered heavy

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losses ;[1] and he ended the telegram with the suggestion that "the relatively good officers and men of the utterly useless 35th, 38th, and 45th Divisions be transferred to the 18th Army Corps and the rest disbanded. And I urge that it may be found possible to send to Irak the regiment of the 52nd Division retained at Mosul, and also one or two regular divisions and a cavalry force." Some hours later an encouraging report was received from an Arab shaikh that the British had retreated to Lajj, and this report was confirmed at 7 p.m. by the men of the 45th Division who had remained near V.P. and had seen the withdrawal from this locality. At midnight, however, a telegram was sent from the commander of the Arab brigade on the Diyalah that a reconnoitring patrol had reported that "the enemy, leaving four battalions and two batteries in front of us, is advancing with the remainder from the direction of the Nahrwan." The effect of this news on Nur-ud-Din was that he gave directions that his army was to retire forthwith to the Diyalah, the 51st Division marching at once and remaining on the left bank of this river so as to cover the passage of the remainder across it. The order was received by the 51st Division shortly before 3 a.m. on the 25th, and it moved away an hour later. As was only natural, there was some crowding and confusion among the rest of the army as the troops endeavoured to effect the passage over the lower bridge in the darkness, and at daybreak "the artillery, transport, and baggage were all mixed up and had rendered the few hundred yards round the approach to the crossing quite impossible." While the Turks were endeavouring to remedy the situation, reports came in at noon from the Cavalry Brigade, which had not received the order for the retirement, that there was no one in the

[1] After the battle the total strength, including Arabs, was only 26,000, so that the losses in killed, wounded, prisoners, and stragglers had been more than 9,000 men. Of the fighting men about 6,000 were killed, wounded, or missing, and of these 3,500 belonged to the 45th Division. On the other hand, the two battalions of the 44th Regiment of the 51st Division had come up, and these were each probably 750 strong.

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Turkish first line except Arabs, and that the British were in retreat covered by a rearguard of cavalry, which was being supported by one and subsequently by two more battalions. This information was no doubt based on the fact of the evacuation of the northern portion of the first line, coupled with the large flow of traffic, on the 25th, between High Wall and Lajj and the numbers of wounded at the latter.

While these events had been taking place Sir John Nixon had ridden back to Lajj early on the 24th, leaving Major-General Kemball to discuss matters with and if necessary to assist General Townshend. Whether a responsible commander who does not exercise direct control over the operations should be present on the field of battle is doubtful, for whatever the advantages, the drawbacks of this system are evident. Awkward situations may, it is true, not arise when, as at Kurnah and Kut-al-Amarah, the Commander-in-Chief has merely to applaud the measures of a victorious subordinate, but this can hardly have been the case in so precarious a contest as that at Ctesiphon. It seems that Sir John Nixon certainly held steadfastly to his self-denying ordinance, and he did not interfere in the conduct of the battle, and he felt, probably, that to do so might dislocate at the critical moment the operations which had been planned by Townshend. Possibly he did not withdraw sooner because it was recognised that his retirement might affect the *moral* of the men. But if he did not propose to assume control over the operations, the Commander-in-Chief was assuredly not unwise to leave the field on the 24th November; for he could otherwise best serve the interests of the troops by supervising the arrangements for the movement up-river of the reinforcements which were now so necessary to redress the balance in their favour.

On the 24th General Townshend had been doubtful as to whether the British could maintain their positions, but, in his interview with Kemball, he declared that he did not propose to retire until it became necessary to do so, although

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the safety of the force would not be endangered for political reasons. From this it may be inferred that the question was raised as to the political effect that would be produced by a withdrawal. Among those who have lived in British dependencies and observed the immense influence exercised in them by a handful of Englishmen, an impression is often produced that Britain's power is dependent on a shadowy prestige, whereas the prestige is the consequence of other factors. And it would be making the service greater than the god rashly to imperil armed forces in the endeavour to maintain the reputation which they help to support. The security of an army must clearly always be the main consideration, and this should be hazarded only in the last resort.

While Townshend and his division had been fighting sternly against disaster, at the cost of losses amounting to no fewer than 4,593 of all ranks, of whom 682 were killed, the medical officers at Lajj had found themselves almost overwhelmed by the great influx of wounded who had already begun to arrive in crowds in the few ambulances, in army transport carts, and on foot, even on the 23rd. Next day the medical officers were forced to arrange to take over all available shipping and barges for the accommodation of those men who were not very severely wounded, rations for four days and medical personnel being placed in each vessel and blankets obtained from the second-line transport of the force. At the same time the two river steamers, which had been roughly prepared for use as hospital ships, were used for the more serious cases.

Abnormal suffering is incidental to war, and there are always limits in caring for casualties beyond which action may be injurious to the success of the operations. The arrangements made in this case apparently did not approach these limits, but if the force in Mesopotamia had waited for its transport to be organised on the scale employed in Europe, the troops would at this juncture still, in all probability, have been standing at Kurnah and Nasiriyah. The operations leading up to the battle of Ctesiphon may

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perhaps be classed with those to which public opinion, according to the event, applies the name of rashness or daring, and, as will always happen in cases of this kind, failure necessarily involved the troops in exceptional hardships.

The night of the 24/25th November had passed quietly in the British lines at High Wall, but, early in the morning, a few Arabs rode right up to the bivouac, and at 9 a.m. on the 25th four or five squadrons of Turkish cavalry were seen to the north-east of the bivouac manœuvring as if to menace Lajj. The Cavalry Brigade, accordingly, was sent out, followed by the 117th Mahrattas, to drive off the enemy, and the Turks thereupon avoided action and withdrew behind the sandhills after a few rounds had been fired by the guns of our horse artillery. Here they were bombed at about 11 a.m. by one of our airmen. Our armed vessels also apparently steamed to Ctesiphon, where they fired at some Arabs, after passing unscathed over the obstruction and minefield above Bustan, which is said to have delayed the enemy's shipping during the Turkish advance to Kut-al-Amarah, and consequently the movement of the army. Meanwhile aerial reconnaissance had disclosed the fact that the Turks were in force and entrenched two miles to the east of the Diyalah, and that three columns were moving from the direction of Kusaibah to these entrenchments. From this it might be inferred that the enemy at any rate did not contemplate an immediate offensive, and Townshend, therefore, was given a respite, the morning being spent in evacuating wounded and in reorganising his force. This was grouped in two main columns, the 16th and 18th Infantry Brigades and other troops being placed under Delamain in column A, and the 17th and the battalions of the 30th Brigade and other units under Melliss as column B. The Cavalry Brigade was retained as a separate entity.

Difficulty was being experienced in feeding and watering the troops crowded together at High Wall, and for these reasons alone this locality would not have been convenient for another battle should the enemy advance. And, since

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the enemy had retired, Townshend could fall back without loss of credit. He therefore decided to withdraw in the afternoon of the 26th to Lajj, and preliminary orders were issued warning the troops to be in readiness to do so.

Two *communiqués* also were made to the men with the object of supporting their *moral*. In the first the whole of the troops were thanked for their valour, and were then informed that the withdrawal to Lajj would be made because the passage of supplies up the river could be hindered by the enemy's cavalry and artillery, and because at Lajj the force could await in security the arrival of reinforcements that were due from France and Egypt in a week's time. In the second *communiqué* the Indian troops were given much the same information, and were told that it was the supply of food that was necessitating the retirement.

During the day General Townshend received a statement setting forth fully the views of the General Staff at General Headquarters on the situation, and in this it was laid down that the tactical decisions must be left to the man on the spot, a truism which was accepted by Sir John Nixon, and indeed could not safely be disregarded.

The reports furnished after the aerial reconnaissances in the afternoon revealed what seemed to the British to be a serious state of affairs, for Nur-ud-Din was apparently about to assume the offensive, and had, it was reasonable to suppose, therefore received reïnforcements. It was now reported that two large columns of Turks were moving forward along the left bank of the Tigris, while a third of mounted men was marching further inland. Later on it was observed that the enemy had pushed a few units into their former second line, and that 10,000 men were in the area between the Diyalah and Ctesiphon.

General Townshend has stated[1] that he "was quite satisfied that an enemy of superior strength was about to attack me. The enemy reinforcements had come from

[1] *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, Major-General Sir C. Townshend.

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the Russian front"; and indeed it was evident that, in the circumstances, the British must either deploy for battle or fall back to avoid envelopment. The British commander decided to avoid battle, and the time for the retirement to Lajj given in the orders which had already been issued was put forward in consequence, so that it would begin at 6.45 p.m. on the 25th instead of at 2 p.m. on the 26th.

The movements of the enemy had, however, not been prompted by the arrival of reinforcements, but by quite different motives. On receiving, on the 25th, the statement of the Turkish cavalry as to the retirement of the British, Nur-ud-Din had sent instructions to this brigade to occupy the old Turkish first line, and drive back what was believed to be the British rearguard. The cavalry commander expressed his inability to deal with a force which was now estimated to comprise four regiments of cavalry, from two to four battalions, and two batteries, and asked for reinforcements. As a result, at 2 p.m. Nur-ud-Din issued orders for the whole of the army to reoccupy the old second line, informing his troops that "the rear of the retreating enemy has changed direction towards Salman Pak [referring presumably to such troops as were visible at High Wall]. The Cavalry Brigade will strive to arrest it." The Turks accordingly advanced in two columns between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m., as seen by our airmen, but after nightfall there was again some loss of direction and crossing of columns, and the troops of the 18th Corps did not get into the position until about 2 a.m. on the 26th.

The whole of Townshend's force, including the Turkish prisoners, was clear of High Wall by 9 p.m. on the 25th, and the retirement was then effected without other incident than an attack on the rearguard by a few Arabs; but the night was cold and stormy and at first dark, and there was heavy rain at times. The armed vessels also reached Lajj in safety in the forenoon of the 26th November.

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CHAPTER III

EVENTS SUBSEQUENT TO THE BATTLE OF CTESIPHON

General Townshend remained at Lajj only until the 27th November. He then fell back before the Turks to Aziziyah during the night of the 27/28th, and here he was reinforced by the 14th Hussars, who meanwhile had arrived in Mesopotamia from India, and two companies of the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment from Nasiriyah. The bulk of the enemy's force was now apparently on the left bank of the Tigris, only an Arab auxiliary brigade being on the right bank, and the Turkish army, which had, it may be observed, now received one aeroplane, moved to Kutniyah on the 29th, capturing in the evening the *Shaitan*, which had gone aground and was abandoned after her guns had been removed or disabled. The Turks, however, did not proceed beyond this place owing to some successful operations against Arabs who were hindering the work of salvage on the *Shaitan*, which had been undertaken in the earlier portion of the day by the bulk of the British Cavalry Brigade supported by a couple of battalions and a section of field artillery. On the 30th Townshend withdrew to Umm-al-Tumal. About 1,500 infantry, 350 sabres, and the 4 howitzers were then sent by him ten miles farther down-river under Melliss, with orders to march as quickly as possible to Kut-al-Amarah and clear the lines of communication near it. These had, under orders from Nur-ud-Din, been interrupted by a few Turks and a number of Arabs from Badran, with a couple of small guns, with the result that, on the 29th, Sir John Nixon

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was stopped when on his way down to Basrah. Townshend remained at Umm-al-Tumal, as this was believed to be as far as his shipping could move in the day, with the balance of his force, about 6,000 infantry, 1,250 sabres, and 26 guns, besides the armed vessels and also the prisoners.

The enemy marched to Aziziyah on the 30th, and here they remained until the afternoon. As had been the case at Ctesiphon, the intelligence obtained by the Turks was far from being accurate; and, when orders were then issued by Nur-ud-Din that the 18th Corps was to advance to and pass the night near Umm-al-Tumal, followed by the 13th Corps, the troops were informed that "the enemy's main body is being transported by steamers. The retreating portion is his rearguard." The 18th Corps left Aziziyah shortly before sunset, with the 45th Division leading. At about 9 p.m. fires were seen in front, and it was concluded that this must be the bivouac of the Turkish Cavalry Brigade, which was believed to be, but was not, in close touch with the British. The Turks, however, soon came under the fire of the British piquets, search-lights flashed out from the shipping and, as the Turks thought, showed up "the confused masses of our troops intermingled in the darkness." It seems that some Turkish guns now fired a few rounds, as did also some of the infantry, the British search-lights were shut off, their camp fires were put out, and the Turks proceeded to settle down for the night. But the commander of the 18th Corps, feeling certain that the British had gone, suggested to Nur-ud-Din that a regiment, the 44th, should be despatched to confirm this supposition. The 44th Regiment was accordingly sent off with instructions to gain the bank of the river to the east of the place where the camp fires had been seen, but lost its way and at daybreak was actually on the bank of the Tigris behind the Turkish army. However, its commander had meanwhile heard from Arabs that the British, probably Melliss's force, had withdrawn, and passed this information to headquarters. At 1.30 a.m., therefore, Nur-ud-Din

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issued orders for the pursuit to be continued on the 1st December.

On the British side the troops had manned their trenches on the approach of the enemy, but without being aware either of the strength or condition of the force which had closed on them. Later on Townshend dictated orders that, if the enemy were found to be close at hand at daybreak, a combined frontal and enveloping attack would be made on them; and he also sent orders for the recall of the detachment under Melliss, and to the shipping to sail at daybreak. At 5 a.m. on the 1st December General Townshend personally explained his intentions to the brigadiers, who were informed that orders had been sent to Melliss to rejoin the main body. At about 6.45 a.m., in the dusk, the transport began to move away from the bivouac, and, as the daylight became stronger, it could be seen by the British that there were a number of tents, large and small, about a mile and a half away to the north-west.

The first blow means much in circumstances such as these, and the British field artillery at once opened fire, causing a good deal of confusion, and even panic, among the troops of the 13th Corps, which had halted behind the 18th. But the 51st Division, which was now on the Turkish left, stood firm, and the enemy, recovering from their surprise, soon replied with both field and mountain guns, apparently four of the former and eight of the latter, some of the shells of which pitched among the British transport and caused a proportion of the animals to break loose and stampede.

A scrambling action then ensued, in which the enemy lost in all 500 men, and at 8 a.m. Townshend drew off and was joined an hour later by Melliss. Of the British shipping, only the Naval forces, a couple of stern-wheelers, one tug, the Bridging Train and its launches, and certain barges carrying supplies, ammunition, and wounded, were still with the troops, and these suffered heavily, for the *Firefly* and *Comet* were set on fire by the enemy's shells and had

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to be left behind, and several launches, barges, and bridging pontoons were also lost. The rest of the shipping succeeded in reaching Kut-al-Amarah, and the land forces gained this place, after a forced march, on the 3rd December.

On the 1st December General Townshend had reported [1] to Sir John Nixon that he had been attacked by 12,000 Turks at Umm-al-Tumal, that he intended to hold Kut-al-Amarah and to defend it as he had defended Chitral, and that he had already issued the orders necessary to give effect to this decision. To this Sir John Nixon's staff replied [1] that: "The Army Commander is glad to hear of your decision, and is convinced that your troops will continue to show the same spirit in defence as they have shown throughout your operations. Reinforcements will be pushed up to you with every possible speed." On the 4th December Townshend telegraphed from Kut-al-Amarah [1] that: "I am making Kut into as strong an entrenched camp as possible in the given time. The enemy's advanced guard is now ten miles off and the main body five miles beyond that. As it is reported that Von der Goltz is at Baghdad now, commanding the enemy's army of six divisions, I shall expect him to turn this place, putting off a force of observation at Kut. I have shut myself up here reckoning with certainty on being relieved by large forces arriving at Basrah. The state of extreme exhaustion of the men demanded instant rest. I was very anxious, and it looked at one time, on December 2nd, as if the whole division would lie down and not be able to move. . . ."

The town of Kut-al-Amarah, which was now about to sustain a siege, is said to have consisted of some 650 irregularly built and densely crowded houses, a few being of brick and the others of mud. It was inhabited by about 7,000 people, was filthy beyond description, and is reported to have been the most insanitary of all those that were occupied by the British in Mesopotamia. In the place itself there were two or three wool-presses, a flour-mill,

[1] *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, Major-General Sir C. Townshend.

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and a covered bazaar; to the north-west and south-east were plantations of dates and gardens with orange, lemon, fig, and peach trees; and on the north there were some brick kilns. On the right bank, opposite to Kut-al-Amarah, there was also a small village possessing both a wool-press and a liquorice factory. (Map 2.)

Kut-al-Amarah, however, possessed some commercial importance as being the centre of a large grain trade, and supplies were freely brought to it for disposal from the districts bordering on the Shatt-al-Hai, which were among the most prolific in Mesopotamia, and also from Badran. The British, therefore, could rely on obtaining supplies of grain if Kut-al-Amarah were used as a post on the line of communication to the front; and it was for the protection of such a post that the few defences that had already been erected round the town had been planned. These consisted of a high-walled fort of mud placed on the left bank of the Tigris about a mile to the north-east of Kut-al-Amarah; and from this a barbed-wire fence, protected at intervals by blockhouses, extended across the 1,700 yards of the neck of the loop of the Tigris in which the town was built.

Regarded from the tactical standpoint, the area possessed few advantages and many drawbacks with reference to defence against an advance from the north-west. The ground was flat and was almost featureless, except for some mounds near the rivers, and for certain irrigation channels that afforded ready-made cover from fire. Both banks of the Tigris must be held by an army standing to fight a battle, otherwise the enemy would be free to sever the lines of communication of the force by river to Basrah. Apart from this, the Tigris, although from 200 to 300 yards wide, was now so shallow in the vicinity of the town of Kut-al-Amarah that, in order even to assure local security, portions of a garrison that was defending it must be placed on both banks of the river, at any rate until the water began to rise again. To facilitate this local defence there was certainly the liquorice-factory village which could be used as a supporting

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point on the right bank. But the Hai also was practically dry at this juncture, and therefore did not constitute a serious obstacle against an advance eastwards, except that its course provided a kind of ditch 100 yards wide, with banks 15 feet high, which could for some distance be swept by concentrated fire from the left bank of the Tigris at Kut-al-Amarah.

The presence of the big loops of the river at and below Kut-al-Amarah, and its north-easterly course, was unfavourable for defence, since the majority of the troops of a small force protecting the town against attack from the north-west would necessarily be standing with their backs to the river, and would therefore be liable to be driven into and enclosed in the first loop. It would then be very difficult for them to escape, even were bridges over the Tigris available. Further, if the defenders were definitely enclosed in this loop they would be shut up in an area measuring only about 3,200 yards from north to south, and 1,700 at most from east to west; and they would be exposed to fire from all sides. The short northern front would then no doubt be advantageous for defence; but for practical purposes the garrison could sally out only from this side, which, however, could without much difficulty be held by the enemy against such an attack.

The neighbourhood of the place was, moreover, such as to afford a besieging army unusual facilities for checking and delaying any forces that might advance up the Tigris to its relief. It is true that the Turkish troops engaged in covering the siege would be fighting astride a river and possibly without means of direct communication between the two divided groups; and that food and ammunition would have to be sent to them by land, since the river traffic could be stopped by the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah. On the other hand, from Sannaiyat 15 miles away, to Hannah 25 miles distant from Kut-al-Amarah, the space between the Tigris and the Suwaikiyah marsh was not more than a mile in width; and the marsh, although apparently

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not impassable by men on foot, could not be crossed by a force of all arms, and was so extensive as practically to prohibit an advance round it. The ground on the right bank below Kut-al-Amarah was also much broken by dry channels and by marshes, and their presence would facilitate delaying action. Further, the distance from Kut-al-Amarah of the positions that might be occupied to cover siege operations was such that the troops investing the place, and those protecting the investment, could readily support and assist one another. Again, on the arrival of the flood water produced by the melting of the snows in the highlands in March, or possibly at the end of February, a large portion of the area round Kut-al-Amarah would be submerged unless dams were made for the purpose of checking the water; the avenues of approach would then be more restricted than ever, and the difficulties of a relieving army would proportionately increase.

From the tactical aspect, then, the position at Kut-al-Amarah possessed few attractions. On the other hand, supplies for about six weeks or two months for 13,000 men, that is for a force of the strength of that under General Townshend, had been accumulated there, as well as a number of ordnance stores; and there were probably quantities of grain in the hands of the trading classes among the inhabitants.

There is more to be said on the strategical side in favour of the occupation of Kut-al-Amarah or of some neighbouring locality. Delay is generally to the advantage of the power that is on the defensive. It wears out the spirit of the attacker, and, in addition, the actions of doubtful friends and potential enemies are held in suspense, as they will be unable to make up their minds with whom to side. Time, also, is gained for the contrivance of measures of defence, for the development of resources, the movement of reinforcements, and the intervention of allies.

The occupation of some area which must be passed by a force that is advancing is plainly one of the most effective

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means of producing delay, and Kut-al-Amarah lay in such an area. Before the advent of railways, large armies operating in Mesopotamia were obliged to move in the districts adjoining the great rivers, as these afforded the most suitable arteries for the transmission of supplies and munitions, and, further, the provision of drinking water was assured. A Turkish force advancing from Baghdad on Basrah could, therefore, best do so by marching down the Tigris, or in flood season down the Shatt-al-Hai; for although the valley of the Euphrates is fertile, the river is shallow and difficult to navigate. Traffic on a river of ordinary width can evidently be stopped by a force that holds one bank even, but when troops can be placed at the junction of two rivers, traffic can be checked on both of them; and it is this fact that constituted the principal merit of the position at Kut-al-Amarah (Map 1).

The locality, however, was not without other advantages. Owing to the uncertain sympathies of the Arab tribes who inhabit the middle and lower courses of the Tigris, Euphrates, and Karun, it was very important to protect them from the propaganda of their Turkish co-religionists. Otherwise a general rising might have taken place against the British, and, in these circumstances, the Persians, whose attitude had for some time been most equivocal, might also have definitely declared for the Turks and Germans. This protection could best be afforded by checking the advance of the Turks at as great a distance from Basrah as possible, and the occupation of Kut-al-Amarah would be favourable for this purpose. Again, if the British abandoned Kut-al-Amarah, a Turkish force operating along the Tigris below it could draw supplies of food from the fertile valley of the Shatt-al-Hai; and since they could not carry the whole of them, the British must destroy a portion at any rate of the supplies and stores that had been accumulated in the place, and this would be disadvantageous.

Very strong arguments can, on the other hand, be brought against this policy. A field army may have retired before

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the enemy for hundreds or even thousands of miles, but so long as it is intact and mobile the campaign will not have been lost, for the balance may be changed completely by one successful action or manœuvre. The primary object, therefore, in war is that the army should be united and free to move as required, for this is the best augury of victory; and a decisive success will retrieve all that has been previously lost or abandoned, whether it is territory, sympathies, or prestige. The occupation by a portion of an army of a locality such as Kut-al-Amarah involves division of force, and there is therefore some likelihood that a lowering of the prospects of success will result. Further, the fact that a part of the army is invested and immobilised cannot but cramp the freedom of action of the remainder, who will feel that they must at all costs hurry to its assistance. The enemy, then, may be given an opportunity of beating the two portions of the forces in detail; or, what amounts to the same thing, may be able to hold off the relieving troops until the garrison have been forced to surrender. In addition, the enemy can prepare positions in localities favourable for this purpose, that must be attacked by the relieving force under disadvantageous conditions.

In this particular case the difficulty of transportation was also a most important factor. The British were short of river transport, and would therefore be in a better position to unite and maintain their forces when closer to than at a great distance from Basrah. Moreover, it was at least doubtful whether the large forces that might be required for the relief of the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah could be transported up-river with sufficient rapidity for this purpose, and also supplied with food and ammunition. The Turks equally were scantily supplied with river-steamers, and the difficulty of furnishing their troops with certain requirements would increase with every step that was taken away from Baghdad. It is true, of course, that if the British had withdrawn to Basrah, the Turks would, for the time being, have been free to advance into Persia, and perhaps even to send

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troops towards Afghanistan. A retirement, however, to some point such as Ali-al-Gharbi or Amarah would not have been altogether disadvantageous for the British, since the tribesmen down-river would probably have remained neutral or would not have become actively hostile, and the concentration of additional forces would have been made more easy. Some difficulty might, it is true, have been experienced in feeding the troops under Townshend until the small depots at Amarah had been expanded. But he could apparently have taken with him from Kut-al-Amarah in steamers and barges a sufficiency of food for immediate requirements, and at worst supplies of a kind could have been obtained by requisition at such places as Shaikh Saad and Ali-al-Gharbi. The Turks, on the other hand, must either have halted, or have attempted to follow the British in spite of shortage of shipping and the difficulties that would have resulted, especially in the season of flood water and if their army were large ; or they must have maintained a considerable detachment at or to the south of Kut-al-Amarah to cover operations in Persia or an advance against Nasiriyah, which could only have taken place during the flood season, and thus have laid open their troops to defeat piecemeal.

The whole strategical problem, therefore, resolves itself into the question as to whether the effect likely to be produced by the action of a British detachment placed at Kut-al-Amarah would compensate for the risk that would be incurred by the British of defeat in detail ; or, what amounts to the same thing, whether the cause of the British would be better served by keeping, or endeavouring to keep, their forces united, or by deliberately splitting them into two portions.

Tactically Kut-al-Amarah was, on the whole, not suitable for the purpose with which it was occupied. Strategically the balance of argument is also against this policy. But it has on occasion been pursued with success—as at Prague in 1757, and at Ladysmith in 1899–1900.

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There is yet another aspect of the matter. The tactical security of a body of troops is, and must be, the paramount consideration when in the field. In the telegram announcing his intention to hold Kut-al-Amarah, General Townshend had pointed out that "the state of extreme exhaustion of the men demanded instant rest." From this it may be inferred that the fatigue of the troops was the decisive factor in governing General Townshend's decision to halt and stand at bay at Kut-al-Amarah, where the short frontage that could directly be attacked would not be unfavourable for his purpose. On the other hand, it must be stated that the place was not invested until the 7th December, and that the British possessed a bridge which gave them the power of transferring their troops from the left to the right bank of the Tigris far more quickly than the enemy could at that time do so.

While General Townshend had been carrying on these operations, Sir John Nixon and the military authorities in India had taken such measures as were possible to deal with the situation. On the 24th November Sir John was informed that the 34th and 35th Infantry Brigades, three field batteries, a regiment of Indian cavalry, and a company of sappers and miners would embark at Bombay for Basrah between the 2nd and 6th December. On the same day a telegram was sent to the War Office pointing out that, in view of the check which had been experienced and of the numbers which had been displayed by the enemy, it was essential that the troops that were to form the reinforcing divisions should at once be despatched from France and Egypt.[1]

Next day General Nixon reported that, with the existing resources in shipping, he could not successfully cope with the large number of troops and quantities of supplies which must in the near future be moved along the line of com-

[1] Some of the units which had served in France were to be left in Egypt, others which had been in that country being sent to Mesopotamia in their place.

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munication. As a result a telegram was sent from India to England asking that the delivery of certain ships that were under order might be expedited. A few days later the Viceroy telegraphed that it was now vital that Nixon should receive, without delay, a large accession of river-craft, and that on this would depend the possibility of relieving Kut-al-Amarah.

Most of the river-steamers with a number of sick and wounded were sent down-river from Kut-al-Amarah on the 4th December, and although these measures were being taken and entrenching was being carried out under the protection of the Cavalry Brigade, it appears that Sir John Nixon did not decide finally until the 5th December that Kut-al-Amarah should be held. Early on this day a message was received by General Townshend from General Headquarters to the effect that, after carefully considering the various alternatives, the Army Commander felt that the only course open to him was to approve of Townshend's proposals. Every effort would be made to relieve the force, and it was hoped to achieve this within two months—a time-limit which possibly was given because at that period the activities of the enemy's submarines were delaying the despatch of reinforcements from Marseilles, and because it was believed that the rations at the disposal of General Townshend would enable the garrison to hold out for two months. In view of the possibility that the 6th Division would be invested—the British were still doubtful whether the Turks would venture to do this—Sir John made the suggestion that it would be wise for Townshend to send to Ali-al-Gharbi any mounted troops and transport that could be spared, as well as all armed vessels and other shipping. In this manner the numbers to be maintained would not only be reduced, but the movements of the relieving force would be facilitated. It was added that the 28th Infantry Brigade, consisting of units from Egypt and France, would be sent to Ali-al-Gharbi as soon as possible, but that the concentration of the main body

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would be made at Amarah under cover of the detachment at Ali-al-Gharbi.

General Townshend has stated [1] that this delay of two months did not suit him, for he apparently feared lest the arrival of the flood season [2] meanwhile should prevent the advance of the relieving force. The news certainly seems to have shaken his resolve to remain in Kut-al-Amarah, for he telegraphed, on the 6th December, that as the Turkish army of six divisions would be round him before two months had expired, it would be best, in the circumstances, to preserve the division by retiring to Ali-al-Gharbi and uniting with the troops that were being sent there. At the same time he decided to evacuate the bulk of the Cavalry Brigade, and orders in consequence were sent out, on the 5th, for a bridge to be thrown to the right bank of the Tigris. The brigade crossed this bridge safely on the 6th, and on the 8th reached Ali-al-Gharbi. By the 10th they had been joined by the bulk of the 28th Infantry Brigade of the 7th Division, under Major-General Sir George Younghusband.

On the evening of the 6th December a long reply to his suggestion in regard to the evacuation of Kut-al-Amarah, was received by Townshend from General Headquarters, which had now reached Basrah. The message began with the statement that the period of two months had been mentioned as an outside limit, and that it was hoped that the relief would be effected sooner. As Kut-al-Amarah had not been invested, supplies might, it was thought, be pushed up from Ali-al-Gharbi and Shaikh Saad after the

[1] *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, Major-General Sir C. Townshend.

[2] The flood season continues from February or March to July or August. In certain localities, such as the area round and to the north-west of Kut-al-Amarah, the stretch between Kut-al-Amarah and Shaikh Saad, and the ground lying to the north of Kurnah, the plain is inundated for miles, although there are sometimes narrow spaces of dry land on the banks of the Tigris. The reason for this phenomenon is that the ground is flooded mainly by water that flows out of the Tigris into the numerous channels and canals which have at various times been cut in the banks for purposes of irrigation, but have now fallen into disuse.

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establishment of the 28th Infantry Brigade and Cavalry Brigade at these places, and within the next week. General Nixon's staff then indulged in some speculation as to whether the Turks had shot their bolt for the moment, as they possessed five steamers only. It was pointed out, further, that if the British retired from Kut-al-Amarah, the Shatt-al-Hai would be opened to the Turks, and withdrawal would also have a bad effect politically. So long as the 6th Division remained in the place, the enemy would be kept in ignorance of General Townshend's plan, and he would be fulfilling his duties as the commander of a detachment, and holding fast superior numbers. Withdrawal should only be undertaken in the last extremity, for it was possible that the enemy's project might be to contain the force under Townshend while concentrating on Nasiriyah and thus menacing the communications of the British. Taking all these points into consideration, the Army Commander was unable to approve of General Townshend's proposal to march to Ali-al-Gharbi.

On the 7th the Turks at last closed in on the town of Kut-al-Amarah, and the siege definitely began. Four days later, in answer to some questions that had been asked from London, Nixon informed the authorities in India that, after exchanging views with General Townshend and fully considering the question of holding or abandoning Kut-al-Amarah, he had come to the conclusion that to leave it would not be advisable from either a military or political point of view. He added, however, that it had not been practicable to do so having regard to the condition of the troops. Townshend, he said, was now virtually surrounded, and in any case grave loss of munitions and stores would have been entailed in giving up the place.

General Townshend had now in Kut-al-Amarah about 10,000 men, excluding 2,200 sick and wounded who were in hospital, and of the garrison 7,400 were infantry. There were also 3,500 Indian followers (transport drivers, etc.) in the place, and its inhabitants, as has been stated, numbered

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about 7,000. The *Sumana* with her 12-pounder and two 3-pounder guns was on the river; and the artillery included four 4·7-inch guns in horse-boats; four 5-inch guns with a total of 850 rounds of shrapnel and 832 of high-explosive shell; two 4-inch guns with 460 rounds of shrapnel and 947 of high explosive; eighteen 18-pounders with 11,200 rounds of shrapnel; four 15-pounders, and two 13-pounders; and there were about 800 rounds of small-arms ammunition per rifle. Apparently rations for 60 days were available for British troops, except as regards tea and meat, of each of which there were supplies for 30 days only; and for Indian troops there were rations for 60 days. There was grain in store for 30 days and fodder for 17 days. In Kut itself there was fuel for 21 days, and there were supplies of wood for 33 days in the liquorice factory on the right bank of the Tigris which was held by a detachment. Stocks of crude petroleum were available in the town, and, as was proved later on, stores of grain and wood in addition. It was estimated, and apparently with fair accuracy, that the Turkish force comprised about 16,000 men, including cavalry and camelmen but not Arab tribesmen; and that it was being served by five steamers and possessed from thirty to forty guns.

Once they had closed on Kut-al-Amarah the Turks prosecuted the attack with energy, and on the 11th December Townshend was obliged to telegraph by wireless [1] that "the enemy pressed us severely all yesterday on my northern front, and fort being attacked heavily now and some pressure along northern front. Enemy entrenched all along quite close up and only kept back by heavy rifle fire, hence expenditure of ammunition very heavy. On December 10th we expended 61,075 rounds of small-arms ammunition. I am very anxious on the ammunition question and hope for relief within ten or fifteen days. . . ." The reports which were received during the next three or four days were more cheerful, but everything seemed to point to the necessity for effecting the relief at an early date. Great

[1] *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, Major-General Sir C. Townshend.

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efforts, therefore, were made to concentrate rapidly a force for this purpose, which was placed under Lieutenant-General Sir F. J. Aylmer, who, on the 8th December, had assumed command of the Tigris Corps, as it was called.

For some days after their efforts on the 10th–13th December the Turks made no serious attempts to attack the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah, and spent their time in harassing the troops and in pushing their trenches nearer to those of the British. This comparative inactivity was ascribed to the heavy losses which had been sustained, but was perhaps also due to their desire both to await the arrival of reinforcements and to reduce the distances to be covered by the attackers before venturing on an assault. Townshend, meanwhile, revised his views as to the sufficiency of the small-arms ammunition that was at the disposal of the garrison, but he stated that the quantity possessed by the artillery might prove to be inadequate. Sir John Nixon now telegraphed to India that, according to estimates made by his staff, General Townshend was being invested by a force comprising four divisions—the 35th, 38th, 45th, and 51st ; that a fifth division, perhaps the 52nd, was now arriving in Baghdad ; and that the 26th Division from Syria was reported to have reached Falujah. It was also not impossible that the 17th and 36th Divisions were on the way to Mesopotamia. A demand, therefore, was submitted for the despatch to Force D of two more divisions, in addition to the 3rd and 7th, as soon as possible.

In view of other liabilities it was, however, decided by the Government that two additional divisions could not, at the moment, be sent to Mesopotamia. Although of importance in the general scheme of British strategy, Mesopotamia evidently was not and could not have been a decisive theatre of the war ; and there was as yet no certainty that the Turks would divert so large a force to an extremity of their empire even on the chance of harassing the British in India. Nor had it yet been proved that their administration would, even with the assistance that could be afforded by German

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advisers, be equal to the task of supplying the troops with all the requisites of modern war. As a palliative the Viceroy agreed to send another infantry brigade, the 36th, from India to Mesopotamia, on condition that twelve British garrison battalions should be despatched from England to India at an early date.

Soon after assuming the command of the Tigris Corps, on the 8th December, General Aylmer had issued instructions to Major-General Younghusband that his force was to remain at Ali-al-Gharbi, and that detachments were not to be pushed to Shaikh Saad, where they would, he considered, be both dangerously exposed and of no assistance to the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah. It was thought that difficulties in regard to transportation would prevent the Turks from advancing on Ali-al-Gharbi, but should they do so, Younghusband was to refuse battle and retire. For some days afterwards Aylmer was fully engaged in the uphill task of forming a staff out of such officers as were on the spot and appeared to be suitable for staff work, and in the many duties that are incidental to the rapid improvisation of a fighting organism. By the 15th, however, he had found time to draw up and forward to Sir John Nixon a statement of his view of the situation and of the prospect of achieving the objective that had been placed before him—the defeat of the enemy on the Tigris line of operations, and the relief of the force that had been shut up in Kut-al-Amarah.

Following closely the estimate that had been made by the staff of the Headquarters of Force D, Sir Fenton Aylmer believed that, at the moment, the Turks could dispose of 15,000 fighting men, and possibly 54 guns, belonging to the 35th, 38th, 45th, and 51st Divisions and to the mounted formations. Another division, the 52nd, comprising 7,000 fighting men, might come up on or before the 1st January, 1916, and the presence of a division of 7,000 fighting men had been reported at Falujah. In addition, it was possible that two more divisions, the 17th and 36th, might reach Kut-al-Amarah between the 20th and 27th January. The

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British, therefore, might in the near future, he thought, be opposed by 27,000 men with 84 guns, including the units engaged in the investment of Kut-al-Amarah, but one-third of the troops had been severely tried and were not of good quality. After its full concentration the Tigris Corps might, however, have to deal with about 43,000 fighting men, exclusive of Arab auxiliaries, with 128 guns. According to the reports from General Townshend, he could dispose of 7,800 fit men, firing rifles, but his daily loss was 75 on the average. The garrison, therefore, would be reduced by 1,200 men by the 1st January, and by 2,400 by the 15th of that month; the wastage of British officers and the fact that the *moral* of certain units had been affected were also serious matters. There was in Kut-al-Amarah small-arms ammunition sufficient to last for six weeks, and gun ammunition for three or four weeks, but it was evident that the arrival at Kut, in the interval, of the 52nd Division and of the division from Falujah would impose a serious strain on General Townshend's force. On the other hand, it was possible that the advance of the Russians, who had moved into Persia to Karmanshah might cause the enemy to deflect troops in this direction. Sir Fenton considered, however, that it would be hazardous to rely on General Townshend's power to hold out beyond the 15th January, and that it would be advisable to effect his relief by the 10th of this month and before the arrival of the 17th and 36th Divisions. According to such estimates as he had been able to make, General Aylmer thought that it might be possible to concentrate at Ali-al-Gharbi, by the 3rd January, a force comprising the 6th Cavalry Brigade, the 7th Division, and possibly one more infantry brigade and some additional units of artillery. The massing of the whole of the Tigris Corps, consisting of the 7th and 3rd Divisions and other troops, would occupy three more weeks. Naturally Sir Fenton would prefer to await the assembly of the whole of his force. At best the successful advance of the 7th Division and the cavalry and additional brigade of

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infantry would involve delay in moving up the remainder, and the defeated Turkish troops would then be given time in which to rally and to make arrangements to offer strong resistance to an advance beyond Kut-al-Amarah. It was, he said, of course not impossible that the circumstances would become more favourable for the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah, and in this case time would be gained in which to complete the concentration of the Tigris Corps; but this was not thought to be probable. The essential point was to ensure the relief of the force under General Townshend, since its capitulation would produce a serious political effect. Sir Fenton, therefore, was strongly of opinion that such troops as could be assembled at Ali-al-Gharbi on the 3rd January—and this force should certainly amount to a division and a cavalry brigade—should advance to the relief of the beleaguered garrison. In spite of lack of transport these troops should suffice for the raising of the siege, as the Turks also had difficulties—they could not supply easily any force sent down-river of Kut, and must probably place these troops astride the Tigris and without the means of direct communication between the two portions; and in this case the British, who possessed a bridge, would be afforded an opportunity of defeating them in detail.

On the 18th December Aylmer received a reply to this memorandum from General Headquarters to the effect that the Army Commander agreed that the relief of Kut-al-Amarah was the essential consideration, and that an advance with this object should be made from Ali-al-Gharbi on the 3rd January, or as soon afterwards as possible. While every date given for the concentration of troops was necessarily dependent on the arrival of the ocean-steamers carrying reinforcements, it should be possible to concentrate troops equivalent to a cavalry brigade, five infantry brigades with 46 guns, and four gunboats at Ali-al-Gharbi on the 3rd January, or 15,000 rifles, eighteen 18-pounder guns, four 13-pounder guns, four 15-pounders, four mountain

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guns, six howitzers, and ten heavy guns; and Townshend could dispose of 7,000 infantry, 30 field and heavy guns, four post guns and four 4·7-inch guns. By the 15th January the Turks could perhaps bring into the field 22,000 fighting men and 60 guns, inclusive of the 52nd Division, or 29,000 men and 80 guns if the 26th Division had also arrived. The 36th Division with 7,000 fighting men and 20 guns might reach Baghdad by the 8th January, and it was possible, therefore, that three fresh divisions might be encountered by the Tigris Corps, although definite news had not come to hand in regard to any of them. It might be concluded, then, that the British might shortly be faced by 36,000 fighting men with 100 guns, but would more probably be opposed by 20,000 fighting men with 60 guns. On the whole, however, it seemed as if the forces under Aylmer and Townshend should suffice to effect the relief of Kut-al-Amarah, and Russian troops that had entered Persia and were now at Hamadan, under General Baratoff, had been urged to co-operate with the British by advancing on Karmanshah. (For details as to the distribution of the British force, see Appendix III.)

The correspondence that had taken place between Generals Nixon and Aylmer discloses one more of the very difficult problems that must be solved satisfactorily if success is to be gained in the field. In view of the tenor of the telegrams that had been received from General Townshend, a fixed necessity for some amelioration of his position seemed to have been established. The problem, as is so often the case in war, resolved itself, therefore, into one of time. Sir John Nixon and Sir Fenton Aylmer had to decide, on a basis composed largely of supposition, as to whether to spend time in attempting the early relief of Kut-al-Amarah, or to devote such time as would be allowed to them by the enemy in completing their concentration for an advance.

So far as the *estimates* of the British were concerned, the principal and comparatively certain factors were thought to

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be that the relief of the force under Townshend must be effected by the 15th January, otherwise the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah might be overwhelmed by the enemy. But the assembling of the whole Tigris Corps could not be completed within this period, and wet weather[1] might at any moment prejudice the success of the operations. There was another important factor to be taken into consideration. The fighting value of troops varies to a great extent according to the degree of team work of which they are capable. The units that were being sent from France had suffered so heavily in the fighting on the Western front that they had almost been renewed. Their team power was much impaired, especially in the Indian units, where friendship and intimacy between officers and men, which is always so important, is a requisite of high efficiency. To group such units in new formations under commanders whom they did not know would be equivalent to making a chain of weak links. Further, any force that could be rapidly assembled would be ill found as regards both staffs and services, since, for some reason, these were among the last of the units to reach Basrah. It may be concluded, then, that if the British advanced with such troops as could be collected by the 3rd January, the fighting power of the force would not be of the best; and, as has been stated, it might be opposed either by 36,000 men or by 20,000 men, the numbers being uncertain. On the other hand, if the advance were postponed, Aylmer's force would be larger and its efficiency would probably be on a higher plane. The strength of the enemy's forces would still be uncertain, but more time would have been allowed to the Turks to concentrate troops, and these would be units of good quality. Should they do so, the danger to the garrison of Kut would not only be increased, but the enemy would have been given the opportunity of throwing up entrenchments in which to delay the advance of the relieving army.

[1] Rain falls principally in December, January, and February, when the storms are often very heavy and are accompanied by cold winds.

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It seems that the questions primarily considered by the British commanders were whether to attempt the early relief of the garrison or to postpone the attempt; and they resolved to undertake the venture. But the possibility of assisting General Townshend by moving such troops as could be brought up by the 3rd January to Shaikh Saad, if this place were not held in force by the Turks, or of closing on it if it were, can hardly have escaped the attention of Sir John Nixon and Sir Fenton Aylmer. Perhaps this middle course was not tried because it was understood that food for the troops in Kut-al-Amarah was available only until about the end of January. But, as matters turned out, it might have proved to be the better alternative; for such an advance would probably have drawn some of the Turkish divisions in this direction, and consequently reduced the pressure on the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah. Further, if the Turks could be induced to stand at Shaikh Saad, and to fight a decisive battle there after the concentration of the Tigris Corps had been effected, the enemy would not have had the advantages that they subsequently enjoyed at Hannah, where the frontage to be defended was restricted, the flanks comparatively secure, and the line of communication relatively short.

The authorities in London were apparently not content with the strategy that had been outlined in Sir John Nixon's telegram of the 11th December, and, on the 20th, the Secretary of State, India Office, complained that he was uncertain as to the plans of the Commander-in-Chief, and as to the reasons for his dispositions. A hint also was dropped that every available man should be concentrated for the relief of Townshend. The advantages to be gained by concentration of effort are, of course, manifest; but as an architect who omits to buttress a great building exposes it to the risk of collapse, so a commander in the field must make provision for the smooth execution of those essential services without which an army cannot fight battles or even exist. The measures requisite for the

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security of the line of communication fall within this category; and, in view of the relative positions of Basrah and Nasiriyah, Sir John Nixon was forced to take such steps as would, in his judgment, insure that the line of communications of the corps on the Tigris was not in danger of interception by enemy forces advancing from Nasiriyah. He was also obliged to arrange for the security of the oil-fields on the Karun, whose free working was of high importance as regards the provision of oil for combustion, and of by-products for the manufacture of munitions. To hold the balance justly between such conflicting requirements constitutes that ever-recurring and most difficult problem of war, as to whether the result of making a detachment will be in furtherance or to the prejudice of the general plan of operations. A proper decision, moreover, can be reached only by those who are in possession of the whole of the data, which include intelligence as regards the enemy, topographical information, questions of time and space, and what is known in regard to the attitude of the inhabitants.

At this period an Arab chief named Ajaimi was again endeavouring to stir up sedition at Suk-ash-Shuyukh and Khamisiyah, and was said to have collected 2,000 men at Ainsadah and to be preparing to attack Nasiriyah. There were rumours that the Turks were massing men on the Euphrates, and it was not impossible that the advance of the as yet comparatively small force to Kut-al-Amarah might have been made to cover this or some other movement, such as an invasion of Persia. Turkish emissaries were also endeavouring to arouse the tribes living along the banks of the Shatt-al-Hai. In these circumstances, and after weighing the other factors, Sir John Nixon decided that it was necessary to reinforce the small garrison at Nasiriyah, in spite of the fact that troops and transport would both be deflected from the operations for the relief of Kut-al-Amarah. It seems that he also hoped that the movement of men to Nasiriyah would confuse the enemy as to our intentions, and to effect this is the constant aim of every commander in the

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field. As a result the headquarters of the 12th Division, under Major-General Gorringe, together with two squadrons of the 12th Cavalry, the 34th Infantry Brigade consisting of the 1/5th Battalion of the Queen's Royal Regiment, the 31st Punjabis, the 112th Infantry, and the 114th Mahrattas, and also the 1/3rd Sussex Field Battery of four 15-pounders, were sent to Nasiriyah at the end of December.

On the 25th of this month, in replying to the questions that had been asked by the Secretary of State on the 20th, the Viceroy gave Nixon his full support, pointing out, most reasonably, that the man on the spot is the best judge of the dispositions of the troops confided to his leadership. He added that the oil-fields would be secure enough so long as the British showed a strong front above Amarah. Whether, as matters fell out, Sir John would not have been better advised to have sent the troops mentioned above to the Tigris Corps rather than to Nasiriyah is, however, open to question. If it were true that a strong front above Amarah would tend to secure the oil-fields, the same influence would be felt, although perhaps in a lesser degree, on the line of the Euphrates; and it is probable that Ajaimi and his friends would have at once relapsed into quiescence if the relief of Kut-al-Amarah had been effected in January. For it was in reality the failure to relieve General Townshend's force that, in the end, justified the despatch of reinforcements to Nasiriyah.

The siege of Kut-al-Amarah was carried on without other incidents than desultory gun fire, perpetual sharp-shooting, minor attacks, and small sorties for some days after the 15th December, when a complete line of entrenchments had been thrown up by the enemy opposite to our northern front. On the 17th authority was delegated to General Townshend to make certain awards of medals and orders to his troops, which would be calculated to raise the *moral* of the garrison. Three days later there were indications that a serious attempt to capture the fort was in contemplation. This work was undoubtedly a weak point in the

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system of defences, for although trenches had been made both inside it and from its eastern angle to the river, the fort was thrust forward so as to form an easy target for converging fire and its northern face could not be flanked from any part of the British lines except the north-eastern bastion. However, the attack was not delivered until the 24th December, when the 52nd Division had arrived and the German Field-Marshal von der Goltz is said to have been present, but returned to Baghdad after the Turks had been repulsed.

It seems that, as a result of their failure to storm Kut-al-Amarah on the night of the 24/25th December, the Turks decided to blockade the place. On the 26th December, therefore, certain movements were made by the enemy which, in the light of what subsequently occurred, indicate clearly enough that, in view of the failure of the assault, it had been decided to convert the siege of Kut into a blockade, and at the same time to take immediate measures to hinder the attempts that would shortly be made by the British for its relief. General Townshend, however, at first not unnaturally formed a different opinion, and telegraphed in the evening to General Headquarters and the Tigris Corps as follows: "As reported previously to-day, I have seen at least two divisions moving up-river since 11.15 a.m., moving by the right bank. Mist prevented seeing if other troops moved previous to 11.15 a.m. in same direction. We watched these columns marching till out of sight, following baggage transport. Steady movement westward all day by transport and infantry with knapsacks and pack animals, field-ambulance flags north-east of fort disappeared. Dust-clouds obscured all view December 25th and conclude Turks crossed to right bank at Abu Dhakar bend December 25th and night December 25/26th in order to avoid my force pursuing, as enemy aware I have no bridge and only one steamer to tow barges and mahailas. Turks retreated by right bank after our victory at Es Sinn [Kut-al-Amarah] September last. Nur-ud-Din must now know of large

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British forces arriving Ali-al-Gharbi ; he would be foolish to try and fight a battle with relieving force, he knows he must be beaten and could never shake off our pursuit on left bank and that of our gunboats. Then his best division has suffered heavy losses in its repulse from the fort. Clouds have gathered for rain last two days ; he could never get his guns away if rain comes down. Enemy has been silent last two days ; some infantry still in trenches opposite our north-west section and fort, but no guns now visible and evidently removed. Two or three steamers standing by his camp on river, possibly will remove tents at night. To sum up, all above indicates a retirement. . . . I think his repulse on December 25th and our concentration at Ali-al-Gharbi has caused his retirement ; will wire to-morrow."

Next day, however, General Townshend took a different view and telegraphed to General Headquarters and the Tigris Corps : " At present it appears that enemy has divided his forces on both banks of the river. Old camp on left bank some six miles west of us remains, but slightly smaller. New camp on pronounced rise of ground some eight or nine miles up-river on right bank, this I take it are quarters of two divisions seen marching up-river yesterday. North of us steady movement westwards of transport and bodies of infantry continues. Indicates that enemy must have received my bridge [1] ; but aeroplane has evidently not seen it to date, and it must be at Abu Dhakar bend. At present one thing appears certain, that he has divided his forces, as he did at Es Sinn [the battle of Kut-al-Amarah] with impassable river between, and only one boat bridge possibly, and he has drawn back, relaxing his hold on me. Thunderstorm and rain in night continued till 8 a.m., our trenches in very bad condition, accordingly enemy's must be in worse state ; but apparently moved most of his guns

[1] The bridge which had been made by the British at Kut-al-Amarah was blown up by them on the 9th December. The words "my bridge" refer apparently to pontoons and material lost at Umm-al-Tumal.

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yesterday. Enemy's object in dividing his forces on both banks would appear to be to entrench a position for defence against relieving force on same lines as at Es Sinn and Ctesiphon."

While these events had been in progress at Kut-al-Amarah, General Aylmer had been pushing on the arrangements for its relief. On the 19th and 22nd December secret instructions were issued giving the number of troops which it was hoped to concentrate at Ali-al-Gharbi; that supplies for one month would, if possible, be taken up-river, as well as horses and ammunition, both high-explosive and shrapnel, for the garrison of Kut; and that the field-service scale of transport for troops without tents would be adopted, but that requirements for the carriage of tents should also be submitted to headquarters.

The force would be organised as one division, with corps troops. The former, the 7th Division, would comprise the 19th, 21st, and 28th Infantry Brigades, the 16th Cavalry (less one squadron), the 107th Pioneers, three or four companies of sappers and miners, the 9th Field Artillery Brigade of eighteen 18-pounder guns, the 61st Howitzer Battery of six 4·5-inch howitzers (this battery was not available at the battle of Shaikh Saad), and other units; the corps troops were to consist of the 35th and 9th Infantry Brigades, one squadron of the 16th Cavalry, the 1/1st Sussex Battery of four 15-pounder guns, two sections of the 23rd Mountain Battery, the 72nd and 77th Heavy Batteries, each of four 5-inch howitzers, two 4-inch guns of the 104th Heavy Battery, two Provisional Battalions composed of drafts for the units in Kut-al-Amarah, the 13th Sappers and Miners, a squadron of the Flying Corps, material for a pontoon bridge, and various signal and administrative units. The 6th Cavalry Brigade would include the 14th Hussars, 4th Cavalry, 7th Lancers, 33rd Cavalry, two sections of S Battery Horse Artillery, and signal and administrative units. Subsequently Younghusband was informed that units as they reached Ali-al-Gharbi were to be so en-

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camped as to facilitate an advance by the 7th Division and Cavalry Brigade on the right bank, and by the remainder on the left bank of the Tigris.

Owing to the prevalence of strong wind at Christmas-time it had not been practicable, until the 27th December, to make a reconnaissance with either of the two British aeroplanes that were available at Ali-al-Gharbi. It was then ascertained that there were 100 tents at Shaikh Saad, that the camps near Kut-al-Amarah were somewhat larger than before, and that a bridge of boats, with ramped approaches, existed at the southern portion of the Shumran bend. On the next day Townshend reported that the Turks were busily entrenching on the right bank of the Tigris to the west of Kut, and that at least a division, with a good deal of transport, had marched past the town and was bivouacking on the left bank three miles to the north-east of the fort.

General Aylmer now sent an enquiry to General Townshend as to the number of troops that would be available out of the garrison to co-operate with the Tigris Corps on the 10th January. Townshend had already forwarded a message that, on the 27th December, the effective strength of the garrison in combatants was 6,764 infantry, 1,051 artillery, 439 sappers and miners, and 204 signal service, or a total of 8,698 besides a couple of hundred cavalry. He now telegraphed that it was understood from prisoners that the 36th Division was following the 52nd Division, which was known to have arrived at Kut-al-Amarah. "We have," he continued,[1] "quite sufficient numbers here upon us as it is without this extra division. I am sure you do not require my reasons for my serious anxiety on the score of any more reinforcements reaching the enemy. I hope if you start on January 3rd, as I understand you do, that you can get here much sooner than January 10th." At the end of the telegram there was a request for information as to the strength of the relieving force and the

[1] *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, Major-General Sir C. Townshend.

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movements of the Russians. It was not until two days later that a statement was despatched that only some 5,000 rifles, three four-gun 18-pounder batteries, one four-gun howitzer battery, and two Naval 4·7-inch guns in horseboats would be available to support the operations of the relieving column; that, as had already been stated, the means of making a bridge of boats no longer existed in Kut-al-Amarah (it was destroyed on the 9th December), but that 50 mahailas (barges) were available to transport troops to the right bank of the Tigris, and rafts would also be improvised for this purpose. In the meanwhile General Townshend also reported that, on the evening of the 28th December, a division, which was subsequently stated to comprise 3,000 fighting men, had moved down the left bank of the Tigris past the town of Kut-al-Amarah.

Sir Fenton Aylmer waited for a day before replying to the appeal that had been made by General Townshend for the early relief of the garrison, but at once replied to the request for news. The commander of the 6th Division was now informed that the composition of the relieving column would be roughly two divisions and a cavalry brigade. The Russian force that was operating in Persia under General Baratoff consisted of about 15,000 troops, who were mainly cavalry, with 14 guns and more than 100 motor-lorries. This force had split up into columns, one of which was marching on Hamadan and would advance as quickly as possible on Karmanshah.

On the 30th December General Aylmer addressed a most pertinent review of the situation both to Sir John Nixon and to General Townshend. After pointing out the disadvantages that were evidently involved in a hurried advance, and observing that the dates that had been mentioned had been given in accordance with a conservative estimate, he stated that he was, however, prepared to incur great risks in order to render assistance to the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah in case of imperative necessity. By far the best plan of action, he continued, would be to carry

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out the advance from Shaikh Saad with the whole corps, and in any case it was essential to put off as long as possible the adoption of any particular project, since hurry must connote inefficiency. In conclusion, General Townshend was asked to give full weight to these considerations before fixing a definite date on which the relief of the garrison must be effected.

Sir John Nixon concurred with General Aylmer in giving preference to the method of methodical advance in force, unless it became imperative to effect the relief of the garrison. General Townshend, however, did not immediately send a direct reply to this enquiry, but telegraphed that cases of self-mutilation and of sleeping by sentries when on their posts were occurring among the troops; that documents calling on the Indian soldiers to rise and overpower their officers had been fixed by the enemy on the wire in front of our trenches; and that some soldiers had been overheard using seditious language in the town of Kut-al-Amarah. But, on the 1st January, 1916, he telegraphed that the Turks seemed to be turning the siege into a blockade, and that only in case of the direst necessity would an appeal be made for immediate assistance from the relieving force. General Aylmer, therefore, continued his preparations with the design of undertaking a forward movement early in January.

Since their arrival at Ali-al-Gharbi the troops under Major-General Sir George Younghusband had hardly been molested except for intermittent firing into the camp by night; although a few Turkish horsemen had, about the 21st December, appeared in support of the Arab tribesmen who, as usual, hung about the area occupied by the British. On the 31st December General Younghusband had been warned that the 7th Division and Cavalry Brigade might be required to advance from Ali-al-Gharbi on the 3rd January; but on the next day, owing to the immense amount of preparatory work still to be completed, it was decided to postpone the forward movement until the 4th.

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Aylmer reached Ali-al-Gharbi on the 2nd January, and on the 3rd he issued written instructions to Sir George Younghusband. In these Younghusband was informed that the first echelon of the troops was placed under his command, and that it was to move, on the 4th January, as far as the neighbourhood of Shaikh Saad. Although it was possible that conditions in Kut-al-Amarah might become so serious as to oblige the first echelon to push on from Shaikh Saad without awaiting the arrival of reinforcements, it was not at the moment anticipated that such a contingency would arise. In no circumstances, however, was General Younghusband to go forward from Shaikh Saad without receiving direct orders from General Aylmer to do so. (Map 2.)

From the information that had been obtained by the cavalry and airmen and through other sources, it was estimated that the Turkish army consisted of the 35th Division of 2,500 fighting men; the 38th Division, also 2,500 fighting men; the 45th Division, 3,500 fighting men; the 51st Division, 6,500 fighting men; and the 52nd Division, 7,500 fighting men; or 22,500 in all. The enemy possessed 72 guns, of which 33 were quick-firing field guns, 19 quick-firing mountain guns, 13 old-pattern field guns, 5 heavy guns, and 2 howitzers. It was believed that there were, in the neighbourhood of Shaikh Saad, 1,100 Turkish camel-men, 900 cavalry, 2 small guns, 2 or more machine guns, and perhaps an infantry battalion. On the other hand, it was not impossible that the enemy division which had been seen to move past Kut-al-Amarah on the 28th December might have reached Shaikh Saad, and if so, the bulk of the troops would probably be found on the left bank of the Tigris. The enemy had also transferred a couple of guns on rafts across the Tigris at a point below Kut-al-Amarah. The main body of the Turkish army was apparently round Kut-al-Amarah, but there were some troops at the Es Sinn positions. It seemed probable, therefore, that if Younghusband were obliged to hasten to the relief of

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Kut-al-Amarah, he would find the enemy in position astride the Tigris to oppose his advance. He was also warned that the Arabs on both banks of the Tigris above Ali-al-Gharbi might on the whole be regarded as hostile to the British. In conclusion, directions were given as to the flights that were to be made by the aeroplanes for purposes of reconnaissance after the arrival of the troops at Shaikh Saad; and it was stated that General Aylmer hoped to bring the second echelon, or remainder of the Corps, forward from Ali-al-Gharbi on the 6th January.

While these preparations had been in progress, the Secretary of State had, on the 29th December, sent definite instructions to the Viceroy embodying the decisions of the Government in regard to the military policy that was to be followed in Mesopotamia. In these it was stated that, after exhaustive consideration, it had been decided that France was the main theatre of operations so far as the British Empire was concerned; and that to France, therefore, the principal forces must be despatched. As regards other theatres of war, an adequate force was required for the defence of Egypt, and, after the relief of Kut-al-Amarah had been effected, a defensive policy must be followed in Mesopotamia. It would not be possible, therefore, to send to Mesopotamia the two additional divisions that had been asked for on the 30th November, but, in order to enable the authorities in India to complete and maintain a fifth [1] division there, twelve garrison battalions could be despatched from England to India. Sir John Nixon must decide whether to remain at Kut-al-Amarah after its relief, or to fall back on Amarah or Kurnah; but in any case defensive positions should be prepared both in the neighbourhood of Kurnah and Shaibah, which could be held in case of need.

On the 3rd January Aylmer consequently received a telegram from General Headquarters in which the situation was again reviewed. Sir John Nixon now estimated the

[1] The 3rd, 6th, 7th, and 12th Divisions were serving in or on the way to Mesopotamia.

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strength of the relieving force as being 15,000 bayonets, 1,500 sabres, and 46 guns, or perhaps from 18,500 to 19,000 fighting men. On the right bank of the Tigris and 9 miles to the west of Kut-al-Amarah he placed the 45th and 36th Divisions of the Turkish army, aggregating 11,500 fighting men with 41 guns ; the 52nd and the 38th Divisions were, it was reckoned, on the left bank of the river engaged in the investment of Kut-al-Amarah, and their fighting strength was estimated as 12,900 men with 24 guns ; lower down the river on the left bank was the 35th Division of 2,500 fighting men and 18 guns. At Shaikh Saad, on both banks of the Tigris, there were thought to be four battalions of gendarmerie, 300 cavalry, and 1,200 camelmen. These estimates—the total amounted to about 30,000 fighting men with 83 guns without the 51st Division—were, it was pointed out, based on maxima, especially as regards guns ; but all the enemy's divisions, except the 36th, had been severely handled in action by our men, and their *moral*, therefore, must have been affected unfavourably. Sir John considered that it was more likely that the Turks would concentrate their forces for battle to the west of Kut-al-Amarah rather than afford the British the opportunity of defeating them in the localities down-stream. Aylmer, in consequence, received instructions that, after having effected the relief of the garrison, he was to throw up entrenchments in the vicinity of the town, and await the arrival of further reinforcements before taking aggressive action. Next day, however, General Aylmer was asked to consider whether, in view of the strength of the Turkish army, it would not be wiser, after having joined hands with the troops under General Townshend, to fall back on Shaikh Saad and there wait for the remainder of his army corps.

It is certainly difficult, having regard to what actually happened and to the estimates of the enemy's forces that had been made by the British commanders, to understand their confidence in the early relief of Kut-al-Amarah. As

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has been observed, the tactical balance of advantage, so far as ground was in question, inclined strongly to the side of the troops whose object it would be to prevent the junction of the two British forces; and, owing to lack of transport, it would hardly be possible for the attacking army to redress this balance by manœuvre. Further, when on the defensive, weakness as regards training and *moral* are, on the whole, of less importance than when attacking; for cohesive movement is more difficult and demands higher qualifications than are required to maintain a position. A force so hastily brought together as that under General Aylmer must also evidently have been wanting in the unity of purpose which is so important an element of power when attacking. Again, the bulk of the British troops had been accustomed to the very different conditions of trench warfare, in which deliberation was the keynote rather than manœuvre; and the heavy losses experienced by the units that had served in France had necessarily reduced their fighting efficiency.

A high wind accompanied by rain prevented the airmen from flying on the 3rd January, but a report came in from Arab sources that there were 4,000 Turkish infantry on the left bank of the Tigris opposite to Hibsh, four or five miles below Shaikh Saad, and horsemen on both banks of the river; and there were rumours of the presence of infantry above Shaikh Saad at Wadi. In addition, on the 4th, General Townshend sent a message that two enemy divisions which had moved in a north-easterly direction past Kut on the evening of the 3rd had not made an attack on the garrison and had perhaps marched to the Sinn positions. Later in the day it was reported by him that another column of from 2,000 to 3,000 infantry, with six guns and a squadron of cavalry, had marched eastwards, and that a marked reduction was visible in the size of the Turkish camps on the right bank of the Tigris above the town of Kut-al-Amarah.

As a result General Aylmer telegraphed to Sir John Nixon that it did not appear as if the enemy would raise the siege

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without a serious struggle at some locality below Kut-al-Amarah, and that subsequently a second position might be occupied to the west of this place. The difficulty of arranging for the supply of forces pushed to the east of Kut might cause the Turks to postpone the actual occupation of a position below the town ; but, so far as numbers were concerned, it appeared as if they would be able both to invest the troops under General Townshend and engage the relieving force in the Sinn localities with superior numbers.

At the same time warning was sent to General Younghusband, who had reached a point about ten miles above Ali-al-Gharbi and was astride the Tigris with the Cavalry Brigade and the 28th and 35th Infantry Brigades and other troops, that punitive detachments were not to be made against certain Arab villages whose inhabitants had molested British shipping ; and, in view of the fact that it might be necessary to make a pause in some locality to the east of Kut-al-Amarah and there wait for reinforcements, measures were to be taken to choose and entrench a position at Shaikh Saad.

During the 5th January General Aylmer had telegraphed to General Headquarters suggesting that General Gorringe should be ordered to advance from Nasiriyah for a short distance up the Hai, and, if possible to Shattrah, in order to relieve the strain which was being imposed on the Tigris Corps. It was proposed that reports should be spread that an important movement had been undertaken, and that the troops should act so as to give colour to them. Telegrams, in a cipher which could easily be unravelled by the enemy, were also to be sent to Townshend in the hope of adding to the illusion.

After considering the pros and cons of the proposals of General Aylmer in regard to an advance from Nasiriyah, Sir John Nixon gave his sanction to the plan. Gorringe, therefore, was directed to advance with a force of all arms for one day's march up the Hai, spreading reports that other troops were to follow and requisitioning transport.

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He was also authorised to call up certain units from Kurnah should he consider this to be necessary.

Younghusband moved on the 5th January to a point on the Tigris twelve or fifteen miles below Shaikh Saad, small bodies of enemy cavalry being encountered on both banks of the river. And during the day information came to General Aylmer's headquarters from General Headquarters that, according to reports received from agents, Nur-ud-Din Pasha, who was in command of the forces near Kut-al-Amarah, could dispose of 30,000 fighting men with 40 guns.

General Townshend also sent a statement that a column from five to six miles in length, and comprising 8,000 fighting men, was in movement down the left bank of the Tigris; that the Turkish camps on the right bank of the Tigris had disappeared from the area above Kut-al-Amarah, while that on the left bank was reduced in size. A Turkish aeroplane flew over Younghusband's column at noon; and in an aerial reconnaissance made by British airmen at about midday, it was ascertained that there was more than an advanced guard at Shaikh Saad, for it was computed that some 10,500 men had been seen in its vicinity on both banks of the Tigris near Hibsh.

Fear for the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah had been the principal cause of the British advance, but, since a large number of Turks had now apparently moved forward to meet them, the pressure on the garrison must distinctly have relaxed. Time, therefore, had in fact been gained by Sir Fenton Aylmer in which to bring up reinforcements and to complete the organisation of his troops, if he so desired. Or the enemy's detachment might be attacked, with the object of defeating their forces in detail. To delay would have provided the enemy with the opportunity, which they were perhaps seeking, of entrenching positions to the east of Kut-al-Amarah. But it would obviously be to the advantage of the British if the Turks could be induced to stand fast and, when we were ready, to fight at Shaikh Saad, where the attacking force would enjoy some scope for manœuvre.

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If, however, the British closed cautiously with the Turks, they could wait or fight as seemed most advantageous, and some such considerations may now have caused General Aylmer to revise his plans. Younghusband, therefore, was posted as to the new situation in a telegram which came to hand at 8 p.m., and he was now informed that there were indications of the presence of a force at Shaikh Saad considerably larger than an advanced guard, that at least 10,500 men had been seen there, and that 8,000 more might come down from Kut-al-Amarah on the left bank during the 6th January, and fall on the British at the end of an indecisive engagement. He was told that the Corps Commander did not desire to run the risk of even a modified check at Shaikh Saad; and he was directed, therefore, to hold the enemy in their positions with sufficient vigour to cause the Turks to show their hand, pending the arrival of the remainder of the Tigris Corps, which would reach a point about a dozen miles from Shaikh Saad on the evening of the 6th January. A bridge was to be made at or near the position gained on the 6th by Younghusband's troops; and information was to be supplied of the presence of any marshes that would interfere with manœuvres for the purpose of outflanking the enemy.

Some misunderstanding occurred in regard to these orders, the advanced echelon was deeply committed to action on the 6th January, and, after a battle lasting throughout the 7th and 8th, the Turks fell back on the 9th January to Hannah. The cause of the enemy's retirement from Shaikh Saad is not manifest, for the Turks, who fought stubbornly, had not by any means the worst of the action. Possibly, however, reports as to the imminence of bad weather,[1] which would increase the difficulty, that must already have been serious, of maintaining their forces at such a distance from their depots above Kut-al-Amarah, may have induced the

[1] As already noted, rain falls principally in December, January, and February, and the storms are often exceedingly heavy and are accompanied by biting winds.

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enemy to abandon Shaikh Saad. On the other hand, the British had suffered about 4,000 casualties among the 18,500 to 19,000 fighting men that were present in this battle, which was a serious matter having regard to the limiting factor of time that was believed to be available for the fulfilment of General Aylmer's task.

During the battle a good deal of telegraphic correspondence by wireless had been carried on between Generals Nixon, Aylmer, and Townshend; and on the 10th Townshend, who meanwhile had received news of the enemy's withdrawal from Shaikh Saad, sent a message to Aylmer to the effect that, in his opinion, the enemy had moved down-river in order to cover the arrival of reinforcements. It was said, he continued, that an additional division was due on the 20th January, and all the latest arrivals had come up before the dates on which they were expected by our service of intelligence. The telegram was concluded with the words[1]: "I think our troubles quite sufficient without more Turks on our backs."

At this date the information at the disposal of the British led them to the conclusion that the Turkish army in Mesopotamia comprised the 13th and 18th Corps under the command of Nur-ud-Din Pasha. The 13th Corps consisted of the 35th Division, which was composed of an amalgamation of the 35th and 38th Divisions, and the 52nd Division, and was commanded by Ali Nejip Bey; the 18th Corps was made up of the 45th and 51st Divisions, with the 26th which had recently arrived in Baghdad, and this corps was under Khalil Pasha. It was also reported that four divisions were on the way from Aleppo, one of which might be expected in a fortnight. In addition, it was possible that the 36th Division was at Khanikin opposing the advance of the Russians, and there were rumours that another army corps was destined to undertake the invasion of Persia by the difficult route leading eastwards from Rowanduz. In the area extending from Baghdad to Khanikin and southwards

[1] *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, Major-General Sir C. Townshend.

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of Baghdad the Turks could perhaps dispose of about 30,000 to 34,000 fighting men with 60 guns and apparently 4 aeroplanes ; but in a month this force might amount to 60,000. On the other hand, it was pointed out that the balance of victory had, so far, inclined against the Turks, whose *moral* should therefore be lower than that of the British.

To oppose the Turks the Russians had sent a force of about 15,000 men into Persia, half of whom were mounted, with 46 guns, and these troops were advancing in several columns on Karmanshah, Tehran, Ispahan, and Kazvin ; but the roads were in a bad state, and even Karmanshah was 220 miles from Baghdad. Sir John Nixon had, however, established direct communication by wireless through Kazvin with the General Headquarters of the Army of the Caucasus, so that more effective measures could now perhaps be taken to secure co-operation between the two armies.

On the British side, with the troops left behind to clear the battlefield, General Aylmer could dispose only of about 10,000 rifles, 1,500 sabres, and 46 guns on land, including the 61st Howitzer Battery which had now reached the front, and one aeroplane fit to fly ; and the men had just fought a doubtful battle. Five battalions were on the way by steamer to join him, five more were at Basrah or on the march, and two battalions as well as 42 guns and a regiment of Indian cavalry were on the sea. General Townshend could still muster 8,500 fighting men, but, owing to the tactical disadvantages of the position at Kut-al-Amarah, it was probable that a smaller and not a larger number than the garrison would be required to invest the place.

For the moment, then, the numbers actually available on each side for the attack, defence, or relief of Kut-al-Amarah were, it appeared, almost equal. But unless the Russians could quickly prosecute their advance through Persia, and the winter season, bad roads, and mountainous country were all against this, the balance might soon definitely incline to the Turks. Further, it was understood

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that rations for the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah were available only until about the end of January; and the rainy season also was now imminent. Even if Townshend could hold out so long, the floods caused by the melting of the snows in the highlands would, in March at latest, make it impossible for troops to advance from Basrah up the road leading along the banks of the Tigris. In the flood season movement near the river would, moreover, even in favourable localities, probably be curtailed both in the neighbourhood of Kut-al-Amarah and above it; and if the dykes controlling the canals above Baghdad were cut, movement might be rendered impracticable in many places.

Time, as is usual in war, was, therefore, again a decisive factor, and the British had again to decide whether to endeavour to gain time by continuing the operations rather than to await the arrival of reinforcements. The principal points now for consideration were whether the supplies possessed by the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah were sufficient to enable it to hold out if the relief were postponed; and if so, whether it would now be judicious for the British to pause, complete the organisation of their force, and bring up reinforcements, the obvious disadvantage of delay being that the enemy would be given the opportunity both of strengthening their positions at Hannah and elsewhere, and also of hurrying forward troops with whom either to overwhelm Townshend or to oppose the relieving army.

It has been pointed out that, in principle, the farther that the battles for the possession of Kut-al-Amarah were fought from this place, the more advantageous would it be for the British. It is considered, therefore, that, unless reports were received from Townshend that the garrison was in danger of starvation or of falling to an assault, General Aylmer should have made a pause in his advance and, while gathering reinforcements, should have tried to induce the Turks again to advance to meet him. The British leaders, as will be seen, however, took the opposite

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view, and they decided that time could best be gained by continuing the operations.

The dispositions of the two armies and their respective problems were now in some respects curiously alike. The Turkish army was divided into three main groups, one standing above Shaikh Saad, one near Kut-al-Amarah, and a third facing the Russians; and reinforcements were apparently being sent to Mesopotamia from other portions of the Turkish Empire. Co-operation between two of the groups was, moreover, hampered by the presence of the British in Kut-al-Amarah. The British force was also split up into three principal portions, one of which was at Nasiriyah, and reinforcements were in or would shortly arrive in Basrah. But the Turkish troops that were now at Hannah practically shut the door as regards direct communication between the force under Aylmer and the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah; unless the former were prepared to leave part of his army opposite to Hannah and march with the remainder to the Shatt-al-Hai along the right bank of the Tigris. The outstanding advantage possessed by the Turks, then, was that the parts of their army were able to communicate directly with one another, whereas the British were prevented from affording direct support to each other both by the enemy and the Tigris. This would enable the Turks to multiply their forces, for, unless synohronous attacks could always be made by Aylmer and Townshend, the same Turkish troops could probably be used to resist the first and invest the second.

The tactical problem before the British was how to effect a junction between their divided forces, and, broadly speaking, three policies could now be pursued by General Aylmer with the object of achieving this purpose. The most direct method was, of course, to defeat the enemy, and to this end General Aylmer could continue to pound the Turks, with such assistance as could be given by the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah, in the hope that the British would be able to break their resistance before they received

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further reinforcements. Sir Fenton could, alternatively, continue to press his offensive, and, when the enemy had been closely engaged, Townshend could endeavour to break out of Kut-al-Amarah. General Townshend, however, was without the means of reaching the right bank of the Tigris rapidly even with infantry, nor could he convey guns and animals over the river in time to assist effectively operations undertaken on the right bank. It appears, then, that only about half of the garrison at best could have escaped in this direction. An endeavour to burst through the maze of Turkish trenches, and, if successful, to march down the left bank of the Tigris, would, on the other hand, have brought him on to the rear of the enemy's main force; for although there were tracks across the Suwaikiyah marsh leading to Badran, they were apparently not practicable for the movement of a force of all arms; and to have reached Badran, where supplies could have been obtained, by a march north-westwards would have involved a long circuit. Again, as has been stated, General Aylmer could perhaps manœuvre round the main Turkish army, which was on the left bank, and advance by the right bank to the Hai with such troops as were not required to contain the army and as could be supplied with food and ammunition.

Had the *moral* of the garrison of Kut been high, an endeavour to break out on the left bank would perhaps have been one of those desperate enterprises that succeed because unexpected, and it would more easily have been concealed from the enemy's agents in the town than an attempt to cross the river. It appears, however, that General Townshend was not confident in the ability of his men to carry through such a venture, for he has stated [1] that "my troops were far different from what they were two or three months ago." There was no choice, therefore, under the policy which had been adopted, but for Aylmer to go on as soon as the reinforcements actually on the way had come up, and endeavour either by force or manœuvre

[1] *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, Major-General Sir C. Townshend.

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to effect a junction with the troops in Kut-al-Amarah; and for General Townshend, by means of sorties and such expedients as the spreading of rumours that the garrison would soon attack the enemy and raise the siege, to hold fast as large a number of Turks as possible.

On the 11th January General Aylmer telegraphed at 1 p.m. to Sir John Nixon from Shaikh Saad a full statement in regard to the situation as follows: "I have been forced to remain here to await the 2nd Rajputs and 61st Howitzer Battery, which have just arrived, and to evacuate as many sick and wounded as possible in their ships. I advance to-morrow morning to the Umm-al-Hannah bend with General Kemball's [the 28th] Brigade, one field battery, the 23rd Mountain Battery, and the 33rd Cavalry, on the right bank, and the remainder of the force on the left. I have established a post here on the right bank with a garrison of one wing of the 2nd Rajputs, a few cavalry, and a gunboat. The sick and wounded who cannot be avacuated before we leave will remain here. After consulting Generals Younghusband and Kemball [who was now commanding the 28th Infantry Brigade], I determined to continue the advance on Kut; but it is my distinct duty to point out that it is a most precarious undertaking, for which I of course accept full responsibility, as I consider the situation demands a supreme effort to relieve Townshend. The Army Commander has full figures of the enemy's strength, and possibly 4,000 may be allowed for his losses and desertions at Shaikh Saad. My fighting strength amounts to about 10,000. The enemy is reported by local inhabitants as occupying a position in advance of Es Sinn at the narrowest part between the Suwadah and Suwaikiyah marshes. This will probably be continued with an advanced line from near Clery's post to the river. My medical establishments, as you may calculate, are deplorably low and the wounded cannot receive proper attention. Even if it is necessary to remove fighting men from the ships, more must be sent up at once. I have only one aeroplane

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in action. On the other hand, I have the greatest confidence that the troops will do what is humanly possible—and I know that the enemy's Arab troops are much demoralised."

That General Aylmer should have warned his superior of the great difficulty of the situation was no more than his duty, and there are few commanders who would not have taken an equally serious view of the situation. Success in war, however, is often gained by the achievement of the apparently impossible when this has become indispensable, and when an opening is given by the enemy without which victory could not have been attained. Some such hope may have inspired the reply of General Nixon, who necessarily was not a prey to the anxieties that were oppressing General Aylmer, and was, in consequence, likely to adopt a more sanguine outlook. Telegraphing at 5.30 p.m. he observed: "I must leave the matter to your decision. Am confident you and fine troops under your command will achieve your object." Nixon then stated that four battalions would shortly reach the front, and that four more could quickly be sent up-river if Aylmer could spare the bulk of the shipping with his force for their transportation. He added: "Meanwhile, however, the enemy will be strengthening his positions. You are as well informed as I am as regards the enemy's possible reinforcements."

As it happened, the immediate difficulty was settled not by General Aylmer, but by the Turks, who, either to gain time, or because of the absence of pursuit, or under political pressure from Constantinople, or perhaps because there was a change in the high command (Khalil Pasha having replaced Nur-ud-Din), suddenly turned about and began to entrench along the line of the Wadi. General Aylmer was in consequence able to telegraph at 10 p.m. both to General Headquarters and to Kut-al-Amarah that: "The Turks have returned and are entrenching a line on both banks, namely up the Wadi River and on the right bank of the Tigris opposite. Aeroplane reconnaissance reports their strength

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as approximately 11,000, nearly all on the left bank. This probably represents the remains of the 52nd and combined 35th and 38th Divisions and cavalry. I am to-night taking up an entrenched position on the left bank in advance of this, as if my intention were to remain here. To-morrow night I shall move well north with one division and Cavalry Brigade and attack his left flank at dawn, holding him in front with the remainder of my force. This has vastly increased our probability of success—and I hope to give him a good beating. Es Sinn was clear of troops at noon and only 300 seen at Abu Rumman." Next day Nixon was also informed that shipping could not now be sent down-river to bring up reinforcements, for if the British were successful in the coming battle, a rapid advance to Kut-al-Amarah would be made with all the vessels.

General Aylmer accordingly attacked the enemy at Wadi on the 13th January, the bulk of his force being despatched under Younghusband to turn and roll up their left flank. At nightfall the latter sent a message to head-quarters as follows: "My troops ring round the Turks except for small portion by river which I hope to fill in shortly. . . . Troops taking up positions they now hold for night. . . ."

As so often happened in this featureless level even when troops were not engaged in a closely contested battle, Younghusband's group had apparently lost its bearings, for a position had only been gained at right angles to the enemy's left. The Turkish force of about 11,000 men, and consisting probably of the combined 35th and 38th Divisions and the 52nd Division, besides cavalry, camelmen, and Arab auxiliaries, was consequently able to retreat during the night of the 13/14th to positions which had been prepared at the mouth of the Hannah defile.

A south-westerly gale, with rain, began to blow on the 14th and continued until the 18th. This completely put an end to the mobility of the British for the moment. On the one hand, a bridge which had been thrown over the

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Tigris, and had been broken by a steamer, could not be repaired owing to the continuance of the bad weather and the exhaustion of the little group of sappers and miners. On the other hand, the ground had now become so sodden and heavy as barely to be traversable by infantry, and to cover even a short distance involved a really great strain. Cold and exposure were, in addition, telling on the health of the force, whose fighting strength, as regards infantry, did not at the moment exceed 9,000.

Information had meanwhile been received from Townshend that the siege had been converted into a blockade investment, and that rations were still available for British troops for 21 days and for Indian troops for 17 days. There was fodder for 5 days, meat on the hoof for 17 days, and 3 days' supply of tinned meat. Apparently, then, time was still available to concert measures for the relief of the garrison.

On the night of the 15/16th, however, in view of the great strength of the enemy's positions at Hannah, General Aylmer telegraphed both to Sir John Nixon and to General Townshend the suggestion that the latter should break out of Kut-al-Amarah, crossing to the right bank of the Tigris, where there were but few of the enemy, and one division and the Cavalry Brigade would advance to meet and assist him. This suggestion was decisively negatived by Sir John Nixon, and, on the 18th January, in replying to a long telegram from Aylmer, in which reference was made to the extraordinarily unfavourable meteorological conditions that were prevailing, it was stated that: "Army Commander recognises the difficulties caused by the prevalence of bad weather, but can you give no estimate as to when you will be able to continue the offensive and your plans for the same? Conditions must make the enemy's supply question very difficult and should prevent the withdrawal of his guns. Have you made any progress on the right bank?"

The result of this reminder was that Aylmer, who had received a few reinforcements, had ferried a portion of his force, including some of his cavalry, by steamer to the right

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bank of the Tigris, and had placed it in localities whence the British could enfilade and take in reverse the trenches at Hannah, attacked this position on the 21st January with the remainder of his troops. The assault was not successful, a downpour came on about noon, and the whole area was soon converted into an expanse of water lying on particularly adhesive mud.

On the morning of the 22nd Aylmer telegraphed to Lieutenant-General Sir Percy Lake, who had succeeded to the command of the force, Sir John Nixon's health having definitely broken down, in the following terms [1]: "I regret that there is no doubt that in attempting to assault the enemy's position yesterday we have suffered a severe reverse in spite of the gallantry of the troops, and our losses have been very heavy. The troops on retiring removed as many wounded as possible, but many must still remain near the enemy's trenches. I am sending a request to the Turks for six hours' armistice to bury dead and bring away wounded. For the present I shall hold the line about 1,200 yards in front of enemy's position and a reserve line behind. The troops' condition may be regarded as prohibiting advance for the present. My proposals will follow on receipt of further information of extent of reverse. Weather is atrocious and floods increasing."

This telegram was followed by a lengthy exchange of messages between Lake, Aylmer, and Townshend, in which it was debated firstly as to whether the Tigris Corps could or could not again attempt to advance before receiving reinforcements; and secondly as to whether Townshend, who now stated that he could hold out on half rations until about the 17th February, should attempt to break out by the right bank of the Tigris, where there was still only a small force of the enemy, should prolong his resistance to the last, or should negotiate for the surrender of Kut-al-Amarah subject to the freedom of its garrison. Sir Percy Lake now decided personally to investigate matters at the

[1] *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, Major-General Sir C. Townshend.

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front. He informed Townshend that his second and third alternatives were out of the question, that he hoped that the relief would be effected, but that Townshend was meanwhile to prepare plans for breaking out should this be necessary. Sir Percy, however, in addition suggested that the garrison might be able to co-operate with the relieving force should the bulk of the latter advance along the right bank of the Tigris. General Aylmer, while still believing that it would be more advantageous for the garrison to attempt to break out of Kut-al-Amarah, also simultaneously made a proposal as to operations by the main body of his corps on the right bank of the river.

Townshend at once took up the correspondence, and, in the first of a number of telegrams, a new situation was on the 24th January unfolded in dramatic fashion. He began by observing that while he was quite prepared to attempt to break out of Kut-al-Amarah, the success of the venture was dependent on the luck of not being heard by the enemy. On the other hand, an advance by Aylmer in force along the right bank would, in his opinion, afford greater certainty of success. The Hai was now a deep and formidable obstacle, and the enemy would be chary of placing a large force to the east of this river with no communications other than a bridge of crazy mahailas. "I have,"[1] Townshend continued, "22 days' food left, but by collecting all the atta [wheat flour with a large proportion of bran] in the town and eating up the horses, we can last much longer. There would be difficulty then about feeding Arab population here; perhaps the Army Commander could in this case get troops from India to make certain of our relief." Later in the day General Townshend supplemented this astonishing revelation by telegraphing: "In regard to other sources of food outside rations—wheat atta we have 34 days' for troops and 33 days' for townspeople. Supplies of oil-mills will work for 30 days' more. In addition we have 80 tons or 2,400 maunds of barley in the town and 1,100 maunds in the wool-press occupied by us on the right bank. We have 3,000 horses and

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mules available. This question I have not brought forward till now as I should not have been justified in killing them till you tell me there is no hope of relief. I suppose only Europeans would eat horse meat and at 10 horses and mules a day there is practically unlimited food for Europeans." In a telegram sent off on the 26th he also observed that he had been aware of the presence of these supplies, but did not bring the matter up until the question arose as to whether the relief would be effected. "Of course," he added, "I do not suppose the enemy will leave me tranquil; as soon as he discovers you are at a standstill he will attempt a supreme effort against me, no doubt taking troops from in front of you for that purpose."

General Townshend has written in his book that: "On the first day of my arrival I organised the defences as follows. . . . A list of all supplies had to be furnished to me, including those available in the town, which would be commandeered if necessary. . . ."; and also that: "It will have been seen that in my orders for the defence of Kut I distinctly ordered all foodstuffs to be commandeered, but the Military Governor found it easy to buy; so that my orders were not carried out in this respect." Further, he informed Sir F. Aylmer that: "The Arab population in Kut is 6,000, distinctly hostile to us and for the Turks. . . . I have searched houses for arms. I did not want to search for food until obliged, as will be easily understood. I knew there was much food in the town, but not so much as we discovered." On the other hand, it is definitely laid down in the Field Service Regulations, 1909, that the "collection, storage, and distribution of all food supplies" are among the items that should be considered in the preparation of a scheme of defence for a locality such as Kut-al-Amarah.

On the 25th January the correspondence had also been continued, and Townshend then sent a message raising certain objections against the proposal that he should break out of Kut. In a further telegram he remarked[1]: "I hope

[1] *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, Major-General Sir C. Townshend.

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you will confer with the Army Commander before the thing is finally settled that you cannot appear before us by a *coup-de-main* on the right bank when you get your reinforcements. I should consider Subi Bey (on right bank), with his mounted troops and possibly two battalions, no obstacle at all. . . . I do not see why we should not hold on here for another two months, as my food wire will have shown you yesterday, in which case Army Commander could call troops from India or Australians from Melbourne." General Townshend then modified his previous supposition that the enemy would make a supreme effort to take Kut-al-Amarah by remarking: "The Turks will be very chary of trying to rush me after what they have received already, and they now have a practical example of the loss they can inflict on you from behind their beloved trenches."

In the evening yet another long telegram came in from General Townshend. In this he began by stating: "I have carefully thought out the situation and wish to sum up my ideas and give you my views and the conclusions I have come to." These may be summarised as follows: It was, in General Townshend's opinion, very unlikely that even 3,000 troops would be able to break out of Kut-al-Amarah unobserved, and 5,000 men, excluding wounded and sick and all guns, must then be abandoned. Should Kut-al-Amarah be captured by the Turks, it was doubtful whether the British would be able even to keep their hold on Amarah, while Nasiriyah would probably be surrounded and fall into the hands of the enemy. So long as Kut-al-Amarah was held by the British, the Russians could, from Kasr-i-Shirin (near Khanikin), seriously menace Baghdad. With the supplies now available the garrison could hold out for 84 days. One or two good British divisions were required in Mesopotamia. Now was the time to ask for an army corps to save and hold Mesopotamia—"if Government considers it worth holding." The Turks, he thought, would not have the heart to leave their safe trenches and assault Kut. The floods, which would arrive in February, would

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compel the Turks to recede, "and the side with most gunboats obtains sea-power which enabled me to take Amarah last June." The defence of Kut, in fact, would save the whole of the Basrah province and gain time for the arrival of reinforcements which would suffice to render the campaign glorious instead of disastrous.

During the 25th January Sir Percy Lake sent directions to General Aylmer in regard to the return of all the river-steamers with the exception of two. In the evening another message was received from General Headquarters ordering both Aylmer and Townshend to consider the following plan for the resumption of the offensive. The enemy's troops in the Hannah position were to be held fast by a containing force which would operate on the left bank, and these troops would be supported by the bulk of the artillery, which would, however, be placed on the right bank. At the same time a flying column would advance along the right bank of the Tigris in the direction of the right flank of the Es Sinn positions; and with this column Townshend would, if possible, co-operate after passing a portion of his force over the River by night. Alternatively Townshend might employ such troops as could be moved by him to the right bank, in preventing enemy reinforcements from crossing over the Hai. "This operation," it was added, "could of course not take place until reinforcements have reached you and the bridge has been reinstated, that is, 7th to 10th February. These reinforcements amount to 11,000 bayonets, 18 field guns (of the 4th Field Artillery Brigade), and 6 howitzers manned by Regulars, and 4 field guns by Territorials, raising your total force to 20,000 bayonets, 1,300 sabres, and 74 guns." (Details as to the distribution of the British force at the end of January are given in Appendix IV.)

General Townshend's disclosures as to the supply of food in Kut-al-Amarah had now, however, produced a considerable change in the situation; and this was also modified by the fact that the flooded state of the ground had caused the Turks to evacuate their forward trenches in the areas

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to the north of the fort and north-west of the town of Kut-al-Amarah. General Aylmer, therefore, was not protesting too much when he telegraphed, during the night of the 25/26th, that Townshend's messages threw a completely new light on the situation, and that it was no longer desired to adopt the plan of a break-out to the right bank.

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CHAPTER IV

EVENTS PRECEDING THE BATTLE OF THE DUJAILAH REDOUBT

An incident now occurred which throws additional light on the immense difficulties that confront a commander when in the field. On the 26th January a wireless telegram was received at about 5 p.m. from Townshend in "clear," that one Turkish division, estimated as numbering 6,000 men, was moving from the enemy's camp above Kut in the direction of Maharijah on the Hai, which was temporarily in flood owing to the rain, "where we can see a bridge being constructed on mahailas (barges)." It was also stated that the Turks apparently intended to operate against the British troops that were on the right bank of the Tigris.

A strong gale had prevented aerial reconnaissance during the day, and, accepting Townshend's conclusion without demur, Aylmer at once took steps to carry out the transfer of the bulk of his force by steamer to the right bank, for the bridge had not been restored, leaving only 3,000 infantry, the majority of the Cavalry Brigade, and 26 guns to contain the Turks at Hannah; and it was hoped that the troops would be across the river before the Turks could bring up guns for the purpose of supporting an offensive down the right bank. The commander of the 7th Brigade group which was on the right bank was also directed to push out cavalry westwards early on the 27th, who were to remain in observation of the enemy. These troops failed to obtain contact with the Turks; the airmen in two aeroplanes that were sent up in the morning saw no signs of the division that had been observed by Townshend, nor of a bridge, but

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one mahailah was noticed to be lying at Maharijah ; and an intelligence agent who came from the direction of the Hai confirmed the reports that had been made by the airmen. Townshend, however, telegraphed, at 11 a.m., that the division had crossed the bridge and disappeared southwards, perhaps bound for Nasiriyah. In the afternoon he stated that the Turks were marching away from the bridge as late as 1.30 p.m. ; and in the evening that a column of transport had followed the division, and that four or five mahailas could be seen in the Hai some 10,000 yards to the south of Kut-al-Amarah, as well as strings of men carrying poles perhaps for the construction of a footbridge.

General Aylmer now began to wonder whether the movement that had been observed was a ruse made in order to induce him to move troops to the right bank of the Tigris, and thus facilitate the delivery of an attack by the Turks from Hannah ; more especially as, in the afternoon and evening, bodies of men were reported to be in motion towards the enemy's trenches on the left bank. One infantry brigade, the 21st, had crossed the river, and the 35th Infantry Brigade and other troops were allowed to continue the passage ; but orders were issued for the 9th and 28th Infantry Brigades to remain in reserve on the left bank, while the 8th and 19th held our trenches there and took precautions against surprise. The night of the 27/28th January, however, passed without much incident, except that some rockets were sent up by the enemy.

The aerial reconnaissance made on the morning of the 28th found that there were three camps on the Hai at Maharijah, each occupied by a force of about a battalion. No bridge was visible, but there was a landing-stage on the left bank to which troops were being ferried in mahailas ; and this news was again confirmed by an intelligence agent who had been in the neighbourhood. It had been noted on the 27th that the Turks were engaged in moving the bridge of boats from the Abu Dhakhar bend two miles

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up-stream, and this fact was now verified; and it was also observed that a slight increase had taken place in the size of the enemy's small camp which was at Es Sinn on the right bank of the Tigris. It seemed, then, as if the British had again been misled by the effect of the mirage. Townshend, however, telegraphed, at 11 a.m., that troops could be seen on the bank of the Hai, and it appeared as if the division were now taking up a position there. It was suggested, further, that perhaps this division would form the general reserve, or offensive wing of manœuvre, of a force that was destined to hold the Hai against the British. At 1 p.m. Townshend reported that what was thought to be the head of a column had been seen at noon marching towards Imam Ali Mansur. At 6.30 p.m. he again sent a message that the advanced guard of the division, consisting of three battalions, had passed out of sight in the direction of Es Sinn, but the main body was still at Maharijah engaged apparently in moving stores over the Hai; also that, at 5 p.m., what might have been a column of 2,000 infantry was seen near Sinn moving westwards, but mist and haze rendered observation difficult at that time.

The day of the 28th and night of the 28/29th passed without other incident at Hannah than some mutual harassing fire, but a strong northerly wind prevented aerial reconnaissance on the 29th. The gale also caused the water in the Suwaikiyah marsh to flood into the trenches both on the right of our line and left of the Turkish position. The aerial reconnaissance on the 30th January found that there were 43 tents—a tent might accommodate from 20 to 25 men—on the bank of the Dujailah canal two or three miles from the Tigris, and 70 tents behind the Es Sinn banks on the right bank of the Tigris; and it was noted that tracks had been formed which led to these camps from the Hai and also from Muhammad Abdul Hassan. On the 31st 98 tents and 4 mahailas were seen by our airmen at Maharijah; there were 200 tents to the south and south-west of the liquorice factory, 95 near Banni just above the

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Shumran bend, 168 near this bend, and the remainder of the camps were as before. It was also remarked, and this information was passed to General Townshend, that the enemy's first line of investment round Kut-al-Amarah consisted of a semicircle of nine redoubts connected by trenches, and that there were four more redoubts behind the western portion of the enemy's second line.

While this very conflicting intelligence was being received, Sir Percy Lake, Major-General A. W. Money, and other officers of the Headquarters Staff had reached the headquarters of the Tigris Corps on the evening of the 27th January. A conference took place next morning, which was attended by the various commanders, when reports were made as to the condition of the troops; and subsequently Lake discussed the situation with Aylmer at length. As a result Sir Percy telegraphed to India that: "The pressure on him [Aylmer] to advance promptly without waiting to organise his force properly and the atrocious weather made his difficulties enormous. . . . Though still threatening, the weather is somewhat improved and the river has subsided; nevertheless Aylmer's troops are not in condition for strenuous work, owing to their having suffered so greatly. He ought, however, to be able to hold his present position until such time as the reinforcements now in Mesopotamia can be brought up as matters are improving. The arrival of a fresh bridging train, which is Aylmer's greatest need, controls the date upon which he will be able to contemplate an advance to the relief of Kut. A largely increased number of pontoons is necessary from India at the earliest possible date, as, although boats and superstructure are on their way up-river, the local boats are proving quite unsuitable for the purpose. Largely in consequence of his heavy casualties it is believed that we can keep him going as regards supplies until such time as he is again made up to war establishments and the three new brigades [which were to be sent from India] arrive. It is hoped that sufficient river-craft to meet increased demands will have arrived from India and elsewhere

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by that time. . . . Regarding the question of Aylmer's future advance and owing to the fact that I shall have no reserves as support in case of reverse, I trust that the arrival of at least part of the three brigades may be expedited."

The situation that faced Sir Percy Lake at this juncture was, broadly speaking, as follows: It was believed that the 13th Turkish Corps, consisting of the combined 35th and 38th, and the 51st and 52nd Divisions, or 12,000 fighting men with 26 or more guns, was at Hannah. The 18th Corps, consisting of the 45th and 2nd Divisions—a total of 12,500 fighting men with 35 or more guns—was thought to be investing Kut-al-Amarah and to be moving over the Hai. The 2nd, 51st, and 52nd Divisions were composed entirely of good Turkish troops—the first had before the war been trained by Von der Goltz—and the total number of guns might be as many as 78. There were also from 1,500 to 2,000 Turkish cavalry at the Es Sinn positions on both banks of the Tigris.

If certain calculations that had been made by the combined Admiralty and War Office staffs in October, 1915, proved to be correct, the enemy could concentrate 60,000 men at Baghdad by the end of January. On the other hand, a later calculation made on the assumption that 1,000 men and their transport animals consume 3 tons weight per day, led to the belief that the enemy could maintain 125,000 at and to the south of Baghdad, and, in addition, 40,000 more at such places as Mosul and Kirkuk. As usual there were very conflicting reports as to the movements of troops from Europe. It was said that the 2nd Corps was expected at Baghdad at the end of December, and a rumour had come in that 4 battalions and 15 guns of the 4th Division had passed through Mosul. On the other hand, it was confidently stated that the 4th Division was in Thrace on the 25th January. The 23rd Division and three others were, however, also reported to be following the 26th Division, which was now thought to be on the way to

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Mesopotamia; news had come in from Constantinople that a force of 36,000 men had left the Dardanelles for Mesopotamia on the 20th January; and a later statement from the same source was to the effect that the 1st Corps, consisting of 20,000 fighting men, 34 guns, and 600 cavalry, had moved from Constantinople for Mesopotamia in December and January. Conversely the 3rd Division of this corps was believed to be in Palestine at Bir-as-Sabah on the 27th January.

If nothing occurred to check these movements, the position of the British might become serious, but whether even as many as 60,000 men could be brought to Baghdad was fortunately doubtful. In spite of the wintry conditions in the Armenian uplands, the Russians were now pressing on towards Erzeroum; and the troops in Persia would advance on Karmanshah as soon as they were reinforced by about 12,000 fighting men and 20 guns, and these numbers would constitute a menace that could not be ignored.

The total number of men under the orders of General Lake in Mesopotamia, including Kut-al-Amarah, and the Persian Gulf was now 63,500, of whom 15,200 were British. Out of the 63,500, about 8,000 were in hospital, sick or wounded, and perhaps 15,000 in all were not available for fighting. Actually the fighting force on the Tigris front was still only some 12,000 bayonets, 1,300 sabres, and 46 guns; but 11,000 bayonets, 18 field guns, and 6 howitzers manned by Regulars, and 4 field guns manned by Territorials, were available for the reinforcement of the Tigris Corps, and when these could be transported to the front the total of Aylmer's Corps would be raised to about 23,000 bayonets, 1,300 sabres, and 74 guns. But the corps would not be fully equipped for the trench fighting which seemed imminent, nor would it be in possession of artillery capable of demolishing well-made entrenchments. There were some 1,300 infantry, a few cavalry, and 6 guns at Nasiriyah, and about 3,000 infantry, 150 cavalry, and

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8 guns at Butyaniyah, to which these troops had advanced in accordance with the proposals that had been made by Aylmer on the 5th January. There were also 3,000 fighting men on the lines of communication, 300 bayonets and 300 sabres in Arabistan, and on the sea there were reinforcements amounting to 6,400 men. In addition, Townshend could dispose of about 8,500 combatants and 38 guns, including 4 post guns and four 4·7-inch Naval guns. He had a fair amount of artillery ammunition, about half the quantity that had been available when the garrison was invested, and about 600 to 750 rounds per rifle, according to the basis used for calculation. (For details as to distribution of troops, see Appendix IV.) The Turks had been forced by the floods to fall back from their positions closely menacing Kut-al-Amarah, and, at the moment, there seemed no longer to be serious risk that the place would fall to an assault.

Further assistance was about to be received by the army in Mesopotamia from India. After some correspondence with the India Office in regard to the movement of units from Home and Egypt to replace any that might be sent to Mesopotamia from India, the Government of India had issued orders for the mobilisation of three more infantry brigades, in addition to the 34th, 35th, and 36th, for transfer with other units to the force under General Lake. Arrangements, too, were being made to rearm the 86th and 104th Batteries with 60-pounder guns. A request had also been submitted for the despatch to Mesopotamia of a siege brigade of 6-inch howitzers with a large quantity of high-explosive shell, and for a flight of aeroplanes suitable for the work of observing artillery fire.

The administrative situation was perhaps even more disquieting than the tactical, for there were still many defects in the organisation of the army as regards the supply and medical services. Of the many steamers that were under order or moving to Mesopotamia, several had foundered on the voyage, and the demands that had been made

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for vessels from Europe and elsewhere had therefore been increased in proportion. Only two or three small vessels had actually arrived at Basrah, one of these was quite useless, and much difficulty was experienced in obtaining crews to navigate the other ships. As a result reinforcements and stores, including firewood, which was still to a large extent imported from India, were reaching Basrah more rapidly than they could be sent up-river, and there were at one time as many as 30 ocean-going steamers in the Shatt-al-Arab. The inclement weather and the floods had almost put an end to movement by march route, and a raised roadway leading up the Tigris was required to obviate this delay in the future. A sufficiency of dry ground was likewise not available at Basrah for the accommodation of men and stores, and this could only be secured by making an extensive series of dams for the exclusion of the water. At the same time good roads must be built so as to permit of free movement from the landing-places to the camps, hospitals, and warehouses. The provision of a marine workshop for the repair of the river-fleet was a matter of urgency; and improvements, in addition, were necessary in the administration of the port of Basrah.

Another factor had also to be considered. The experience of the Tigris Corps during the wet weather had given a foretaste of what might be expected when the snow floods came down in March. The Turks, being higher up the river, held it in their power to submerge certain localities almost at will, and could, therefore, probably at any time limit the frontages on which the British must deliver attacks. The Tigris Corps, in consequence, would be obliged to fight against water as well as against other warlike weapons. Further, the Turks, if defeated, could check pursuit by cutting dams and flooding areas behind them.

As regards the attitude of the natives, the withdrawal of the British from Ctesiphon had not produced a marked effect on the Arabs, except in the case of certain sections inhabiting the districts adjoining the Shatt-al-Hai. In

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general the Arab tribesmen were still content to sit on the fence, and, according to the fluctuations of the contest, those up-stream of the British became hostile, while those down-stream became or remained friendly. The tribesmen both of the Pusht-i-Kuh and of the Bakhtiari clans had been exposed to anti-British propaganda and a section of the inhabitants of the Persian province of Fars had definitely declared against us, and might attack Bushire. There were, accordingly, important political questions to be dealt with in regard to our relations with these men, and also with the central Arabian chieftains Bin Saud and Bin Rashid, and these necessarily exercised an influence on the measures that had to be taken for the security of the lines of communication.

The first and most important of the questions that must have been considered by Sir Percy Lake was whether attempts should still be made by the Tigris Corps to effect a junction with the force under Townshend, or whether he should be given orders to endeavour to break out of Kut-al-Amarah; and apparently there was never any wavering in regard to adhesion to the first alternative.

The next question would naturally have been that of the command of the troops operating on the Tigris, where by far the larger proportion of his force must be concentrated so long as active operations against the Turks for the relief of Kut-al-Amarah continued to be the primary consideration. It is submitted that it is only in exceptional circumstances that the commander of a small army should delegate to a subordinate the tactical control over the main body. Although the correct solution of the administrative problems that have been enumerated was of great importance, these do not appear to have been so vital or so difficult as to require such constant personal supervision by the Commander-in-Chief as would prevent him from directing the actions of his principal force on the battlefield. Sir Percy Lake, however, decided otherwise, and steamed at 11 a.m. on the 29th January down the Tigris to Basrah.

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General Aylmer was left in command of the Corps, but Major-General Sir G. F. Gorringe [1] was appointed to be the Major-General of the General Staff of the Corps for the purpose of assisting him in his difficult task. General Gorringe, however, apparently acted as the Chief of the whole Staff, and directed administrative matters as well as operations, thus shouldering a heavy burden both of work and responsibility.

On the 26th January General Townshend had thought it advisable to issue a very frank communication to his troops. In this he observed [2] that General Aylmer's force had been checked "some 14 miles below the position at Es Sinn, where we defeated the Turks in September last when their strength was greater than it is now." More reinforcements, he continued, were on their way up-river, and he confidently expected that the garrison would be relieved during the first half of February. He next explained his reasons for the occupation of Kut-al-Amarah, and informed the troops that there was ample food for 84 days, not counting 3,000 animals which could be eaten. After urging the men to stand fast and check the enemy's advance, General Townshend added that, when ordered to go forward to Ctesiphon, he "officially [2] demanded an army corps, or at least two divisions, to perform the task successfully. Having pointed out the grave danger of attempting to do so with the division only, I had done my duty. . . . Perhaps by right I should not have told you of the above, but I feel I owe it to all of you to speak straightly and openly and to take you into my confidence." The *communiqué* was concluded with the words, "Save your ammunition as if it were gold," and these were underlined or in italics.

General Townshend states that this communication had a most excellent effect on the garrison, but it could not be expected that it would not come to the knowledge of the

[1] He was created K.C.B. on the 29th October, 1915.

[2] *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, Major-General Sir C. Townshend.

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enemy, and its analysis could then hardly have failed to afford much information that would, it is submitted, be of even greater relative value. The Turks, for instance, would learn exactly the amount of food that was available, or, if they did not credit the figures, would be given a good basis on which to found enquiries. They would ascertain the date by which it was expected that the garrison would be relieved, and could take measures to prevent it. They might also infer that, while food was plentiful, ammunition was not; and that, in spite of his confident statement, some doubt as to the early arrival of the relieving force lingered in the mind of the British commander. If the prospects of relief were so favourable—the Turks might argue—it was strange also that General Townshend should have considered it necessary to refer to his actions prior to the battle of Ctesiphon, and also to his decision to hold Kut-al-Amarah. The fact is that a proclamation of this nature is in reality a questionable expedient, and in most cases is as likely to do harm as good, or to injure rather than assist the cause.

At this juncture General Sir Beauchamp Duff, the Commander-in-Chief in India, telegraphed to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir William Robertson, in London, his views on the situation in Mesopotamia for the information of the War Cabinet. Sir Beauchamp began by stating that apparently the Turks could dispose of a force of 5 divisions at and below Baghdad, or 32,000 effectives with 50 guns; and that there might be an additional division at Khanikin. By the beginning of March the enemy might be able to concentrate in the region of Baghdad 11 divisions, with a total of 80,000 combatants and 132 guns. Against this force Lake would eventually place in the field 45,000 rifles, 2,500 sabres, and 120 guns, but, should Kut-al-Amarah fall, this total would be reduced to 36,000 rifles, 2,500 sabres, and 86 guns.

General Duff next stated that the immediate object of the enemy appeared to be the capture of the force under

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Townshend. Having effected this, the Turks might either continue operations against the British or, after detaching a force sufficient to hold them in check, might enter Persia and attack the Russians. In favour of the policy of further operations against the British it might be argued that, if Kut-al-Amarah were in Turkish hands they could, during the months of flood from March to June, use the Shatt-al-Hai for river-transport, and this would enable them to turn and outflank the British positions at Kurnah. Should the Turks follow this policy it might be necessary for the British to concentrate their forces so as to avoid the risk of defeat in detail. If the British fell back below Amarah, the roads from this place to the oil-fields and to south-west Persia generally would be thrown open to the enemy, and the Pusht-i-Kuh, Bakhtiari, and other tribes would be exposed to Turkish pressure and influence. Further, if the Turks were successful in driving the British to the south of Amarah, operations in Persia could be undertaken by them without concern as to the security of Baghdad. On the other hand, Sir Beauchamp observed that the floods would inevitably hamper any force that was attacking, and this was an argument against a vigorous offensive by the Turks during the season of flood water. The physical conditions during the summer in Persia were, moreover, as favourable as those in Mesopotamia were disadvantageous.

The Commander-in-Chief said, in continuation, that it must be recognised that, whatever was the result of the efforts to relieve Kut-al-Amarah, it would not be possible, particularly in view of the shortage of river-transport, to renew our advance against Baghdad in the near future. Should Kut-al-Amarah fall, our future actions would be affected by the fact that the more nearly our troops could menace this locality, the greater would be the risk undertaken by a Turkish force advancing down the Shatt-al-Hai, and the greater also would be our power of influencing the Pusht-i-Kuh, Bakhtiari, and the Persians generally in our favour. If the British withdrew below Ali-al-Gharbi these

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advantages would be lost, since the intervening distance would prohibit the delivery of a sudden attack against Kut-al-Amarah. With Ali-al-Gharbi in their possession, the British also would be on the flank of the routes passing through the territory of the Pusht-i-Kuh, either to Amarah or to the oil-fields. The above, wrote Sir Beauchamp, shows that Kut-al-Amarah is the key of our position on the Tigris. And he added that, if Kut-al-Amarah were lost, the British should endeavour to maintain themselves as far forward as possible, and certainly not nearer to the coast than Ali-al-Gharbi. Events would then show whether this place could be held, whether a further retirement was necessary, or whether the British could again assume the offensive. Should a withdrawal prove to be essential, the British could then fall back to the line Ahwaz, Kurnah, Nasiriyah.

The question of the strategical importance of Kut-al-Amarah has already been dealt with at length. As regards the other arguments put forward by Sir Beauchamp Duff in regard to the possibility of an advance on Nasiriyah or down the Tigris, every problem can be approached from many points of view, and it is therefore permissible to point out that, if the British were suffering from shortage of river-transport, the Turks, who had only five or six steamers, were at least in as difficult a situation, even allowing for the fact that many supplies could be obtained locally, and that stores could be floated down-stream in native craft. At best, then, the movements of any considerable forces down the Hai or Tigris must be deliberate. If Kut-al-Amarah held out until the end of April, time, moreover, would probably not be available for a successful advance by the enemy on Nasiriyah before the floods had subsided in August. On the other hand, if the British were obliged to retire down the Tigris during the period of flood, when large stretches of land near Kut-al-Amarah and Shaikh Saad are covered by water unless this is held back by means of dams, they could keep the roads by which they fell back comparatively

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dry by means of these dams, but could break them and inundate the country behind the army, thus increasing the difficulties of the enemy. In fact, it would have been most difficult for the Turks to attack Nasiriyah and to prosecute operations against it in the dry season. And, although after their defeat at Kurnah and the capture of Amarah the enemy did retreat by land and water to Kut-al-Amarah in June 1915, while troops were subsequently pushed forward again in July to Filai Filah and Kumait, it would apparently also have been very difficult for them to advance down the Tigris in force when the river was in flood, owing to their lack of steamers. Equally the British could not have moved in force up the river during the floods except by relying mainly on their shipping. Again, as has previously been indicated, the Turks would hardly venture to march on Nasiriyah unless and until the British had been driven some distance down the Tigris, perhaps as far as Amarah. Even then a detachment must be left on the Tigris in order to prevent the British from again pushing forward by land and river to Kut-al-Amarah and severing the communications of the force that was attacking Nasiriyah. This would involve the division of the enemy's armies and would give the British an opportunity of defeating them in detail. So far as mobility was concerned, the British were expecting considerable additions to their fleet of river-steamers, whereas the Turks could not receive any. As the vessels arrived, the mobility of the British army would increase, and the power of transferring troops rapidly by river to any locality that was menaced would, in effect, multiply the British forces, and more particularly if the enemy assumed the offensive.

Soon after his return to Basrah from the Tigris front, Sir Percy Lake took the unusual step of requesting General Gorringe, who, as has been stated, had become the Chief of General Aylmer's Staff, to furnish his personal views on the situation at Hannah. Gorringe replied on the 2nd February that the fact that a forward movement had been made by

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the Turkish forces along the right bank of the Tigris had now been definitely ascertained. This, he observed, was favourable for the British, since the enemy's troops had become more widely distributed ; and an opportunity, therefore, was afforded " of attacking material portions of his total force on the right bank while holding the remainder of his advanced troops on the left bank to their position with minimum forces." The presence of Turkish troops had been reported at Badran, but these were not sufficiently numerous to affect the general situation to a great degree. The position of the British as regards supplies had much improved, and further reinforcements should now be brought up-river both to increase the numbers available, which were dangerously low, and to enable the offensive to be resumed along the right bank of the Tigris as early as possible. Operations could not commence until a suitable bridge had been built, and the despatch of the material requisite for this purpose should be expedited. It had been ascertained that there was not a sufficiency of bridging plant in Kut to allow of the construction of a bridge on which General Aylmer's force could cross over to operate on the left bank of the Tigris after reaching the Hai, nor could Aylmer transport the necessary material for this purpose. Consequently, " our operations in the first instance must be confined to the right bank, but should be pushed as far as the Shumran at least, the Kut garrison co-operating by sending troops across the river and furnishing our offensive force with supplies." General Gorringe ended by remarking that, if the British were successful, the Turks would probably evacuate the Hannah position, that he considered the prospects of victory to be good, and that the paper had been shown to the Corps Commander, who agreed with its contents.

Two days later Aylmer himself submitted a project to General Headquarters which was practically the same as that which had been proposed by his Chief of the Staff. Sir Fenton stated, however, that, should the first success not be sufficiently complete to enable the British to cross

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the Hai and seize the enemy's ships, bridges, and camp at and to the west of the Shumran bend, it might be necessary to withdraw the garrison from Kut-al-Amarah, and perhaps subsequently to fall back to the positions at the Wadi. "Such a contingency, though not probable, is a possibility, and should be carefully provided for, so I consider that I should have full discretion in further operations after joining hands with Townshend."

Sir Percy Lake had now heard that the 13th New Army Division, which had fought on the Gallipoli peninsula and had, after the evacuation, been moved to Egypt, was being prepared for service in Mesopotamia. On the 5th, however, he concurred in Aylmer's proposals, subject to the stipulation that, after the relief of Townshend, the British should not withdraw further down-river than their present position, unless such withdrawal became imperative.

While this correspondence was in progress the British airmen had, on the 3rd February, reported that six Turkish cavalry squadrons had advanced from the Hai to the Es Sinn banks, and Aylmer consequently drew some more of his cavalry to the right bank of the Tigris. At about this time our cavalry made a reconnaissance with the object of ascertaining whether the Suwaikiyah marsh could be passed by a large force, and a report was submitted that this was not practicable. A mounted reconnaissance was also made of the area lying to the south of the Umm-al-Brahm. On the 5th February news was brought in by the airmen that the enemy had completed the construction of a bridge over the Hai. General Townshend now sent a message that scurvy had broken out among the troops in Kut-al-Amarah, that the Gurkhas alone of the Indian troops would eat horse-flesh, and that the Turks had begun to entrench on the right bank to the east of Kut so as completely to encircle the garrison.

On the 6th February General Aylmer gave detailed information to the Headquarters of the Force and also to Townshend in regard to his new plan of action. At this

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period it was thought that it was the enemy's intention to occupy the Sinn position on the right bank with one division, probably the 2nd Division, and a cavalry brigade; and that the latter might attempt, under Subhi Bey, to raid the British line of communications. General Aylmer's present project was to advance, about the middle of February, up the right bank of the Tigris by night with the Cavalry Brigade, about 12,000 infantry and a strong force of artillery; and a minimum detachment would be left to contain the Turks at Hannah. He observed, however, that supplies could be carried in the transport for one day only, in addition to such food as would be on the persons of the troops. Sir Fenton then dealt with the action to be taken under either of two hypotheses, reliance being, in each case, placed on the fullest co-operation on the part of the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah.

In case A, it was intended to follow the enemy across the Hai, should our success be sufficiently pronounced; and Townshend was asked whether the works that were now being constructed by the Turks on the right bank of the Tigris would render it impossible for him to pass troops over it before the enemy had been obliged to leave the neighbourhood. In case B, Aylmer considered the course that should be followed if the Turks, after being driven across the Hai, succeeded in rallying and checking the further advance of the British. In these circumstances it was proposed to hold the enemy back while the whole of the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah, including the sick and wounded, were deliberately transported to the right bank. It was added, for the information of General Townshend: "The Army Commander has sanctioned my requiring you to do this if, in my opinion, the circumstances necessitate it." Various retrenchments, continued General Aylmer, might be required in Kut-al-Amarah in either case, but especially in case B, to enable the garrison to withhold any assaults that might be attempted by the enemy. On the other hand, the conditions might be such that it would be more

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effective for General Townshend to sally out on the left bank rather than cross to the right bank of the river. In all cases, however, rations for the relieving force must be obtained from Kut, and perhaps sent beforehand to the liquorice factory; and these and other arrangements should be put in hand at once. Finally, the question as to how the garrison were to pass over the Tigris was examined at great length, and, since bridging material could not be transported by Aylmer, and Townshend did not possess a sufficiency of it in Kut-al-Amarah to cover the 300 yards of river that must be crossed, it was proposed to make use of flying bridges.

General Lake's reply to this telegram was to the effect that these plans should have a good prospect of success. It did not, he said, appear to be either possible or advisable to postpone further operations until after the arrival of additional reinforcements from overseas. The despatch to Mesopotamia of the 13th British Division had now been definitely arranged, and Sir Percy observed that while its leading units might begin to arrive in Basrah by the end of February, they could not reach the Tigris front until the 15th March. It was, however, not certain whether the river-craft that would be available would even then suffice for the transportation of these troops. On the other hand, it was calculated that a sixth Turkish division might reach Baghdad by the 22nd February, and a seventh on the 12th March. The Commander-in-Chief next mentioned that it was proposed to concentrate the 13th Division at Amarah, should the situation as regards river-transport admit of this, while the three infantry brigades from India could be retained at Basrah. In conclusion, he pointed out that bad weather might delay the movement up-river of the 13th Field Artillery Brigade, which had arrived in Basrah at the end of January, and which Aylmer had apparently intended to await before advancing; but it was added: "The Army Commander leaves the matter to your discretion to commence operations when ready."

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General Townshend telegraphed on the 7th February that he would use his best endeavours to co-operate with the relieving force, but could only do so with three weak brigades, leaving one weak brigade and the bulk of the artillery in Kut; that it would not be possible for the garrison to begin the passage of the Tigris until General Aylmer's force had arrived on the Hai; that certain cables and ropes would be required for the construction of flying bridges; and that, generally speaking, the other measures that were required had been taken. It was then pointed out that, if General Aylmer could soundly beat or destroy the Turkish forces on the right bank, a general retreat would ensue. "You can," said he, "turn him on the right bank, and to deal with a turning movement he must quit his entrenchments; and then the Turk is no use. But 12,000 rifles seems a small maximum force out of 20,000. Surely one brigade entrenched on the left bank is ample to hold the Turkish force at Hannah in respect. . . . If you have any doubt as to the result, would it not be wiser to wait and unite all your forces before advancing, particularly with regard to the 13th British Division. If this effort failed, it would be a grave affair. . . ."

On the 8th February Sir Percy Lake forwarded his views on the situation to the Commander-in-Chief in India. A general statement as to the existing situation and numbers on both sides was first made, in which the Turkish force was estimated as amounting to 1,500 sabres, 24,500 bayonets, and 78 guns, while Aylmer would soon be able to count on 1,300 sabres, 23,000 bayonets, and 74 guns. Sir Percy then remarked that the arrival of the 13th and Indian Divisions would, by the end of March, increase the British force by 18,000 bayonets and 76 guns, exclusive of any field artillery that might in the meanwhile be sent to Mesopotamia from India. On the other hand, during the same period the Turks might receive a reinforcement of four divisions, with a total of possibly 30,000 fighting men and 96 guns. On the whole, he considered that, at the end of

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March, the numbers on the Tigris front would be approximately equal, but the superiority in guns would probably rest with the British. Whether the Turks could bring larger forces to bear before the end of March would depend on the situation in other theatres of war. General Lake then observed that he was prevented by lack of land-transport from carrying out operations in force at any distance from the rivers; and that the task of reinforcing the troops under General Aylmer was taxing the river-transport to the utmost. "There is," he said, "uncertainty as to the arrival of new craft from overseas, extensive repairs are often necessary, and casualties *en route* of frequent occurrence. It is impossible, therefore, to foresee what force we can maintain beyond Amarah for any given date." Sir Percy was of opinion that our military policy should be governed by two main considerations—first, the desirability of effecting the relief of Kut-al-Amarah; and secondly, the absolute necessity of maintaining our hold on Lower Mesopotamia. The arguments in favour of and against the first were, he said, well known, and serious consideration must be given to the second should our attempts to join hands with the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah end in failure. General Lake then stated that, in view of the doubts that were entertained in regard to the dates on which reinforcements would reach Mesopotamia, and also as to whether there would be sufficiency of river-craft for their transportation and maintenance; and further having regard to the possibility of an increase in the strength of the enemy's forces, he considered that it was not desirable to put off the attempt to relieve Townshend. He held, therefore, that General Aylmer should again advance as soon as the bulk of the reinforcements that were now on their way up the Tigris reached the front. A fair prospect of success was, he said, offered by General Aylmer's plan of action, and plans were also being elaborated for co-operation between the garrison and the relieving force. After dealing with movements that might be undertaken after the relief of

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the place, General Lake reminded the Commander-in-Chief of the influence that would be exercised by the floods; and he concluded by stating that positions were being selected at Ali-al-Gharbi, Shaikh Saad, Filai Filah, and Amarah for occupation in case of need.

At this juncture it was decided by the War Cabinet that, in order to ensure that the whole resources of the Empire should be employed to the best advantage, the War Office should undertake the control of the operations in Mesopotamia through the Commander-in-Chief in India. The following was to be the general procedure that was to be observed. Instructions in regard to military operations in Mesopotamia and Persia would be issued by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to the Commander-in-Chief in India, under the authority of the Secretary of State for War. All information obtained in India that might affect the operations was to be reported to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and repeated to Mesopotamia. For the present India was to be the main base of the forces in Mesopotamia, which the Commander-in-Chief in India would continue to administer; but the War Office would arrange for the supply of such requisites as could not be provided in India, subject to the general policy that had at the time been decided by the War Committee of the Cabinet. All reports, states, returns, and demands for additional units would be sent to the Commander-in-Chief in India, who would repeat them to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff; but the commander of the force in Mesopotamia would correspond, as necessary, directly with the Chief of the Imperial General Staff in regard to the requirements of the troops.

Sir Beauchamp Duff therefore submitted Sir Percy Lake's review to the War Office. In doing so he remarked that, since the Turks must leave a force to invest Kut-al-Amarah, it did not appear that they could bring more than 16,500 men and 58 guns in the middle of February against the British, who would then be able to dispose of 23,000 men

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and 74 guns. At the same time the Commander-in-Chief did not consider that this superiority of guns was sufficient to enable Aylmer to drive the enemy from their fortified positions, and it would, he thought, be better to await the arrival of the 18 guns (the 13th Field Artillery Brigade) that were on their way up-river and were due at the front on the 18th February. When General Lake made his appreciation he apparently was not aware that the units of the 13th Division would begin to arrive on the 22nd February, and that the whole division would have reached Mesopotamia early in March; nor that the leading battalions of the three brigades from India would reach Basrah early in February, although the last of these troops would not have landed until the 15th March. In these circumstances the Commander-in-Chief was of opinion that the offensive should not be undertaken prematurely. So long as the advance was not delayed later than the 15th March, General Aylmer should, he considered, wait for all the reinforcements that could be obtained, unless the situation of the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah became so critical as to require earlier action. Sir Beauchamp Duff was prepared to run the risk that the Turks would be able in the interval to bring up larger numbers than could the British. He did not think that Townshend would be capable of giving much direct assistance to the relieving force. As regards future action, all that could now be said was that if Kut should fall, the British should not, in any case, withdraw below Ali-al-Gharbi.

Sir William Robertson sent a reply on the 10th February to General Duff's communication. In this he laid down that, for the present, the main object must be the relief of Kut-al-Amarah; and that the decision as to the subsequent action of the force under Sir Percy Lake must await on the result of our operations. Sir William went on to say that, subject to this proviso, he found himself in general agreement with the remarks that had been made by Sir Beauchamp Duff in regard to General Lake's review of the situation. But

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he added that to his mind, "after considering the relative rate of arrival of our reinforcements and those of the enemy, and also the conditions in Kut, the time selected should be determined by that which gives the most favourable prospect of success." The Chief of the Imperial General Staff then proceeded to point out that, according to the calculations of the officers at the War Office, there were at least six Turkish divisions in Mesopotamia, with a strength of 50,000, including the men of all the many auxiliary services. Two or three additional divisions might also be present in this theatre, and, if so, the total would be raised to 78,000 men. It was estimated that the maximum number that could be maintained by the enemy below Baghdad was 50,000 in all, or 40,000 rifles with from 75 to 100 guns. "In view of the above," said Sir William, ". . . I presume that suitable instructions to Lake will be issued by you, for his guidance, as to the date of renewing active operations, until the conditions which confront Aylmer are fully appreciated by us." After remarking that there could be no question of approaching the Russians in regard to active measures until the approximate date of Aylmer's advance had been fixed, General Robertson observed that, in his opinion, the position as regards transport was the most important matter, and he asked for a detailed statement as to the river-steamers that were available and their capacity, and as to whether the river-craft under order would completely satisfy requirements.

On the next day Sir Beauchamp Duff telegraphed to Sir Percy Lake the War Office estimate as to the Turkish forces. He then stated that, as Townshend could still count on 8,000 men and 30 guns, and in view of the difficulty that must be experienced by the Turks in maintaining troops down-stream of Kut-al-Amarah, the estimate that had been sent from Mesopotamia of the number of Turkish troops that were facing General Aylmer, namely, 24,500 bayonets and 78 guns, might be correct; but the number of guns possessed by the Turks might be less and the number of bayonets

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larger. Sir Beauchamp then hazarded the opinion that the Turkish troops in Mesopotamia were already more numerous than could be maintained below Kut-al-Amarah, so that the arrival of fresh divisions would not aggravate the difficulties of the problem confronting General Aylmer. On the other hand, it did not appear that, by the 15th February, General Aylmer would enjoy such superiority in artillery as would give him a substantial assurance of success. There were, he pointed out, still 18 guns on their way up-river, the troops of the 13th Division should begin to arrive in Basrah by the 25th February, and the Indian Division should land between the 19th February and the 17th March. In order to enable the British to reach Townshend while his supplies lasted, a blow must be struck between the 15th March and the end of the month, and Sir Beauchamp did not think that there was any need for an attack to be made before the earlier of these dates. "Much," he went on, "depends on your river-transport, and the final decision must remain with you; but I feel strongly, and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff I know agrees with me, that so far time is on our side, and that, subject to the capabilities of your river-craft, our advantage lies in the concentration up-river of every possible man and gun before we put everything to the test, and not in an early movement."

Sir Percy Lake had already telegraphed on the 11th that his river-craft barely sufficed to keep up the supplies of the force under Aylmer; that rain had again stopped the movements of the troops that were marching up-river; and that in spite of every effort to make a raised roadway in time, it was doubtful whether the land route between Amarah and Kut could be utilised after the middle of March when the floods would have begun. Only one tug and two paddle-steamers had come to hand out of all the vessels that had been demanded, and the latest information was not favourable as to the arrival of river-steamers from Egypt. Until such time as an effective increase took place in the river-transport, the 13th Division could not be moved

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to the front, and in present circumstances only infantry could be sent up by water in the barges that were used for the movement of supplies. This it was proposed to do, if the Commander-in-Chief approved, with the object of building up a reserve at Amarah.

On the next day Sir Percy Lake telegraphed that if it were feasible he would agree with the soundness of the plan that had been proposed by the Commander-in-Chief in India on the 11th. General Lake had, however, already been obliged to inform Sir Fenton Aylmer that no reliance could be placed on the arrival at the front of any considerable portion of the reinforcements from overseas before the end of March. This was due to the insufficiency of the river-fleet, and because the snow-floods would probably come down by the middle of this month. Everything, however, would be done to expedite the movement of troops up-river; and General Aylmer had been told that, before delivering another attack, he should await the arrival of the maximum reinforcement that could reach the Tigris Corps within the time-limit fixed by the power of endurance of the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah; unless a favourable opportunity occurred meanwhile for an offensive along the right bank of the Tigris. It was, added Sir Percy, fairly certain that the area at Hannah which was occupied by the British and Turks was liable to be flooded; but this was not the case as regards the positions on both banks of the Tigris at Es Sinn, which had been constructed by the Turks during the last flood season.

On the 12th February General Sir William Robertson telegraphed that, since river-transport presented such difficulties, it was desirable that, before the attack was undertaken, war-worn units should as far as was possible be replaced by others. It should, said Sir William, also be impressed on Sir Percy Lake that every man and gun that could be maintained there should be sent to the front. General Lake, however, replied that troops could only be relieved if transport were available for this purpose, and that,

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speaking generally, the movement of additional troops would reduce by 40 per cent. the supplies that could be carried in the river-steamers.

While this exchange of views had been in progress Sir Percy Lake had also telegraphed on the 8th February to General Aylmer certain arguments which had occurred to him both in favour of and against the early recommencement of his operations for the purpose of joining hands with the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah. In favour of postponement there were the facts that General Aylmer's force would be augmented by an artillery brigade (the 13th) of 18 guns as well as by 450 British infantry drafts; there were 3,500 Indian drafts in Basrah, and, in addition, 2,000 drafts, of men belonging for the most part to units that were serving the Tigris Corps, were expected to reach Mesopotamia on the 15th February; and 1,000 British infantry drafts and 500 horse and field-artillery drafts were due from England about the 14th February. A large proportion of these drafts could be shipped and conveyed to the front by the 25th of the month, and, although time would not be available for the incorporation of the whole of the men in their units, they would be available for guard duties and for the preparation of defences at Wadi or Shaikh Saad. The leading units of the 13th Division were expected in Basrah between the 25th February and the end of the month, and these would be sent up to Amarah to act as support for the Tigris Corps. The postponement of the advance would allow more time for arrangements to be made with the Russians in regard to an advance towards Karmanshah, although there was, at the moment, no reason for anticipating that they would be able to co-operate effectively with the British.

Against the postponement of a further attack there was the possibility that the enemy would receive reinforcements. According to the latest information there were in or to the south of Baghdad the 35th, 45th, 51st, and 52nd Divisions, and the 2nd Division which had newly arrived. It was possible that the concentration of a sixth division, possessing

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24 guns, might take place in the neighbourhood of Kut-al-Amarah by the middle of February, and that a seventh division, with 12 guns, might have come up by the end of this month. Additional time would also be allowed for the strengthening of the enemy's position, and particularly of the lines on the right bank of the Tigris, should the fact of General Aylmer's concentration of force on this bank become known to the Turks in advance. The enemy would, moreover, be given the opportunity of improving their communications across the Tigris below Kut-al-Amarah and over the Shatt-al-Hai. The telegram ended with the words: "The Army Commander does not wish to sway your decision either way, as he feels that you on the spot are best able to weigh the *pros* and *cons*."

The views of Sir Fenton Aylmer at this period were as follows: If it could be assumed that the two new Turkish divisions could not arrive until after the resumption of the offensive by the British on the right bank, there would be a good chance of its proving successful, and the sooner it was undertaken the better. It appeared as if the enemy would receive reinforcements more quickly than the British, but if the Turks could put even one division (5,000 to 6,000 rifles) into the Es Sinn position on the right bank of the Tigris, there would not be much prospect of making a successful attack with the British force of 13,000 men, which was the maximum that could be employed, having regard to the quantity of land-transport that was available. If the attack were postponed for six weeks it would be possible to substitute British troops belonging to the 13th Division for Indian troops to a large extent in the composition of the force; but the men of the British units would be out of condition and also new to the country and its peculiarities. Further, any advantage gained by this substitution would probably be nullified by the arrival of Turkish reinforcements, and by the fact that the enemy's positions would, in the meanwhile, have been strengthened. The conclusion, as regards this aspect of the matter, was

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that, if the plan of attacking along the right bank could not be executed at once, the arrival of additional British troops without a corresponding increase of transport would not improve matters so far as this particular scheme was in question. If, then, the plan could not be carried out forthwith, and if land-transport could not be procured as well as reinforcements, the plan must either be altered or another adopted.

The difficulties confronting the British would, however, by no means have been solved were both reinforcements and transport for them to have been received; for the flood waters might have come down in the interval to such an extent as to enable the enemy to inundate the country at his pleasure, and, in these circumstances, movement away from the banks of the river would be rendered impracticable. It was, moreover, almost certain that the country would be under flood water from the 1st April onwards, while there was a possibility that the floods might arrive at any time in the month of March. If, then, owing to the arrival of enemy reinforcements, or to any other cause, the plan of making an advance along the right bank at an early date must be abandoned, a new plan must be devised for the relief of Kut-al-Amarah. Under this not only must the existing force be utilised to the fullest possible extent, but the greatest possible advantage must be derived from the presence of reinforcements as they came up.

General Aylmer then considered the action to be taken during the periods either of high water and flooded country, or of normal river when the neighbourhood would not be flooded. In the first case operations would be confined to the vicinity of the Tigris, and the presence of transport for the reinforcements would not be of material importance. It would then be best to capture the Hannah position first, and also the Sannaiyat position if this were occupied by the enemy. The next step would be to close on both banks on the Es Sinn positions, where the Turks would be holding not only a very extended frontage, but their forces would

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be split up by the Tigris, unless this could be bridged below Kut-al-Amarah, for which time would be required. In the second case General Aylmer took into consideration the plans to be adopted both if the reinforcements arrived without transport and if they brought it with them. In the first of these circumstances, since the strength of the mobile portion of his force would be limited by the quantity of transport that was available, it was evident that the more nearly the British could approach to the enemy's main force the better; and here again Sir Fenton was driven to the conclusion that to employ effectively our total strength would involve the capture of Hannah and Sannaiyat as a preliminary measure. Supplies could then be moved up-river to the troops as they were attacking the Es Sinn positions. If the reinforcements brought with them a sufficiency of transport, a scheme of attacking the enemy on the right bank similar to that which had been tentatively adopted could be carried out; but, in the meanwhile, their long period of inactivity would have an injurious effect on the *moral* of the troops. It would be difficult, however, to concentrate the large amount of transport that would be required for operations of this kind, and, even if this were practicable, the nearer that the British had approached to both of the Es Sinn positions the greater would be their chances of success.

General Aylmer was of opinion, therefore, that unless the plan of an early advance along the right bank could be carried out with good prospects of bringing it to a successful issue, it would be necessary to await the arrival of the two divisions, and, if this delay proved to be essential, the greatest possible pressure should forthwith be exerted against the Hannah position. There was, in General Aylmer's opinion, only one alternative to this last plan, namely, the despatch of a column round the Suwaikiyah marsh. But as the road was not known, the distance was more than 60 miles, and our available transport would permit only of the movement of a very small force, there

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was little hope of inflicting a surprise on the enemy. The other possible course of action—the abandonment of Kut-al-Amarah—had been vetoed. Sir Fenton Aylmer also considered that, as a preliminary measure, steps should forthwith be taken to secure as much as possible of the country round his camps from the flood waters, by the construction of dykes or the repair of those that were in existence.

On the 10th February General Aylmer telegraphed to the headquarters of the force that two essential conditions for the success of the proposed attack along the right bank with a maximum of five brigades were fine weather and that the enemy should not be in excessive strength at Es Sinn. He pointed out that he could only judge from day to day as to whether the proposal continued to offer a good chance of success. If, in his opinion, there was a probability of achieving victory, the plan would be put into operation at the most opportune moment; but it would be advisable to await the arrival of the 13th Field Artillery Brigade (which had begun to march up-river on the 7th and 8th February) and also the 1,450 British drafts. General Aylmer then dealt with the alternatives that might be followed in case this project were dropped, stating that the despatch of the two new divisions (the 13th and the three infantry brigades and other troops from India) and of drafts also should then be expedited to the greatest possible extent, preference being given to the troops of the 13th Division. Operations would not be delayed for the purpose of enabling land-transport to be moved to the front, but as many steamers, barges, and mahailas as could be spared would be required to replace it. His task, he said, would be greatly facilitated if a second bridge 250 yards long were provided. He remarked that it would probably be advisable to concentrate some of the reinforcements at Shaikh Saad in the first instance. This would be done both as a precaution and also as a menace to the enemy, since it was understood that the road leading from Shaikh

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Saad to Kut-al-Amarah round the Umm-al-Brahm was practicable during March (flood-time), provided that the dykes controlling the channels leading into the marsh were kept intact, which would be carried out.

Next day Sir Percy Lake telegraphed to Aylmer that it was not safe to assume that either the 13th or new Indian Division (i.e. the three brigades and other troops from India) could reach the front in time to take part in the relief of Kut-al-Amarah. The river-craft were not coming in up to time, and it was doubtful if either complete division could be transported to the Tigris Corps by the end of March at the earliest. But the infantry, with as much of their transport as could be carried, would be sent up-river as soon as possible. On the 12th February Lake telegraphed his agreement with General Aylmer's opinion that, unless a favourable opportunity should occur meanwhile for an advance by the right bank of the Tigris, it would be better, before attempting the relief of Kut-al-Amarah, to await the maximum reinforcements that could be brought up within the time during which the garrison could hold out. It had now been announced that a brigade from India should begin to arrive in Basrah by the 19th February, and the first troops of the 13th Division were expected about the 28th of this month; and everything would be done to expedite their despatch up-river. All Indian drafts that were available would be employed in the construction of a road above flood-level between Kurnah and Amarah; and General Aylmer was asked to co-operate in this undertaking by despatching a company of sappers and miners to repair the breaches that had been made by the rain-water floods at Kumait. Shortly afterwards Aylmer detailed the 13th Sappers and Miners for this duty. General Aylmer was also informed that certain pontoons for the second bridge were being sent up the Tigris, and that others were expected from India.

On the 15th Sir Percy Lake again telegraphed an enquiry as to whether Sir Fenton considered that an early advance

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along the right bank of the Tigris offered the better prospect of success, or whether it was intended to postpone the offensive so as to collect the largest possible force within the time that would be available before the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah would be forced by starvation to surrender? It was pointed out that the 13th Field Artillery Brigade was now being sent up-river from Kurnah by steamer, and that the last of the vessels carrying it should have reached the front by the 1st March. If, however, it were decided to deliver the attack before the arrival of this brigade, there would be no necessity for its despatch by ship, and the vessels would be available for the movement of supplies. After referring to the opinions that had been expressed by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the Commander-in-Chief in India, Sir Percy pointed out that the effect that would be exercised by the floods must be taken seriously into consideration. If the waters rose to the same level as had been reached in 1915, the greater part of the countryside might be under water; and if a sudden inundation took place before the operations for the relief of Kut-al-Amarah had been completed, the British might be involved in serious difficulties. This fact would probably influence General Aylmer in deciding on the date for the commencement of the attack. The 1/2nd Gurkhas, it was added, would reach Basrah on the 20th February, but the dates on which other troops would arrive from India and Egypt were quite uncertain. It was General Lake's intention to place one of the new divisions at Amarah, and to retain the other in and near Basrah, but he would send to the front any units that it was possible to move.

While this correspondence was in progress, General Townshend, to whom the majority of the messages had been repeated, had announced his intention of slaughtering 600 animals gradually, which would enable the residue to be fed on barley up to the 1st April. After this date 25 animals would be killed per day. While expressing some anxiety as to whether the Turks might not make a supreme effort

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to storm Kut-al-Amarah, Townshend now put forward the suggestion that Aylmer should advance by the desert route leading from Shaikh Saad to the south of the Umm-al-Brahm, which would oblige the Turks to leave their position at Es Sinn for the purpose of opposing the British. He pointed out the tactical importance of the enemy's bridge over the Hai, and warned General Aylmer that the Turks were throwing up trenches on the western bank of the Hai, not far from the Tigris. It was also stated that work was in progress on the Shumran canal, which would enable the enemy to flood at will the area between the Shumran bend and the liquorice factory.

On the 17th February General Aylmer sent another long telegram to General Headquarters, in reply to Sir Percy Lake's message of the 15th February, which was repeated to Townshend. After remarking that it was not possible to estimate the exact strength and dispositions of the enemy, and that at any time information might be obtained which would alter existing opinions, he said, however, that it was probable that a considerable force was still holding the position at Hannah. On the other hand, there were indications that troops were being transferred at Magasis, by barge and raft, from the left to the right bank of the Tigris; and unless men were being withdrawn from Hannah, this would be difficult to explain, for other units would certainly be sent to the Es Sinn position on the right bank by the bridges over the Tigris and Hai. General Aylmer gave it as his opinion that the Turks attached great importance to the fact that, by denying the Tigris for a distance of 25 miles below Kut-al-Amarah to the British shipping, they would force the Tigris Corps to make a long march across country, during which the maintenance of the troops must be undertaken by means of land-transport; and he considered that the Turks would be foolish to risk the loss of this advantage by unduly weakening the garrison of the Hannah position. He believed, therefore, that this would not be reduced below the number of 8,000 men.

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On the other hand, were the British to gain a marked success on the right bank, the moral effect might be such as to induce the enemy to withdraw from Hannah altogether.

It was, said General Aylmer, in many ways to our advantage that a strong force should remain in the Hannah lines, and demonstrations could be made to oblige the enemy to retain the troops in them. In this manner it would be possible to oblige the enemy to reduce the numbers that would be available for the reinforcement of the Es Sinn position on the right bank of the Tigris, where it was thought that there was now a body of troops approximating to one strong division, besides guns and cavalry. "I am," he continued, "pretty sure that the Turks anticipate an advance by us on the right bank, and see that we must turn their right flank as they are strongly entrenched from the Sinn Abtar redoubt . . . to a strong redoubt which they are constructing on a mound. They have also constructed a bridgehead on the north of the Hai where the bridge is." General Aylmer then stated that the difficulties that would be experienced in moving troops from Baghdad and in maintaining the forces that were standing to the east of Kut-al-Amarah would probably prevent the Turks from placing a larger force in Es Sinn than one strong division with cavalry and guns, except in a crisis and for a short period. Consequently any forces surplus to those required to hold Hannah and the Es Sinn position on the right bank must remain at Shumran or round Kut and the liquorice village. Reports had been received of the arrival at Baghdad of a seventh division which was remaining there. Even if these reports were exaggerated, General Aylmer believed that reinforcements might reach Shumran at any time; but it was improbable that they would be sent farther eastwards, owing partly to difficulties in regard to their maintenance, and in part because the Turks would be uncertain as to the bank of the Tigris on which the British would next take the offensive. In the immediate future, then, it was considered that the enemy's troops

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would be distributed as follows: At Hannah from 7,000 to 8,000 infantry; at Es Sinn on the right bank, 8,000 infantry; blockading Kut-al-Amarah, 5,000; mobile reserves from 3,000 to 4,000 men, which might gradually be increased to 10,000 men.

Turning to the numbers that could be employed by the British, General Aylmer observed that these were governed by the quantity of transport that was available. At the moment he was able to provide a sufficiency of transport for the carriage of food for one day for a force of five brigades, and food for two days could, in addition, be carried on the persons of the men. Two additional brigades, for which little or no transport would be available, could be used for the purpose of demonstrating against the front of the Es Sinn position on the right bank; and, in doing so, they would minimise the dangers that would follow were a counterstroke to be delivered by the enemy, or were a reverse to be experienced by the main force of the British. There was, therefore, said General Aylmer, no advantage to be gained by awaiting the advent of very large reinforcements (without land-transport), except that their arrival would strengthen the containing force at Hannah. There were, however, obvious disadvantages in delaying to take action, for this would enable the enemy's reserves to be increased, the entrenchments at Es Sinn to be strengthened, and the time available before the country might be inundated would be shorter. Whether the attack could or could not be made on the enemy's positions on the right bank depended on the weather and the state of the ground, which, after being soaked, did not, until it had for several days been in sunshine, become sufficiently dry to admit of the movement of large columns of transport, particularly by night. General Aylmer added significantly: "It rained last night and the weather is now very threatening indeed." The commander of the Tigris Corps went on to say that it was still intended to launch the attack at the most opportune moment, but if there were a prospect of

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receiving a reinforcement of two infantry brigades within a reasonable period, the commencement of the operations might be held in abeyance pending their arrival. Should circumstances combine to render the manœuvre along the right bank impracticable, General Aylmer would renew his attack on the Hannah position; and in order to provide for this eventuality the British entrenchments were being pushed towards those of the enemy, which were now 750 yards from our front lines. In view of the enemy's power of flooding areas of country lying to the west of Hannah during the season of high river, it was considered that a further attack on Hannah must be made before the rise took place in the water. As regards reinforcements, it was, therefore, not a question as to the maximum numbers that could arrive before the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah would be forced to capitulate, but of the largest force that could be sent up-river and maintained at the front before the advent of the floods. Apparently, then, the two new divisions as a whole would not be available for an offensive on the positions at Hannah, but, in any circumstances, as many troops as it was possible to supply with food, and British units preferably, should be sent to the front; for the more nearly that the men of the Tigris Corps approached to the Sinn position on the left bank, the larger would be the forces that could be employed and the more difficult would it be for the enemy to decide where to despatch his reserves.

Sir Percy Lake telegraphed, on the 18th February, his general concurrence in the plans of his subordinate; and he added: "You may rely on all available reinforcements that can be maintained being pushed up to join you as speedily as possible, preference being given to British units."

There are many points of great interest in this situation and in the views expressed by the various authorities. The first is the question on whom should have devolved the duty of deciding whether a further attempt should be made to effect the relief of Kut-al-Amarah? If it is admitted that

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the decision as to whether the general plan of campaign is to be offensive or defensive is a political consideration, then it was evidently for the Home Government to issue, as had been done, these instructions through the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. It would be for the local commander-in-chief to formulate his demands for the means necessary to enable the attack to be prosecuted with success; and it would be for the authorities at Home and in India to provide and despatch these means so that, if possible, they would be available in time to be used with effect.

The next consideration is on whom should fall the duty of fixing the period when the offensive should be undertaken. Plainly this could be decided only by an authority who, so far as was humanly practicable, was in possession of all the data necessary for the formation of a just opinion. Now, the Commander-in-Chief in Mesopotamia could alone have first-hand information in regard to the vital factors of transportation outside and within the country, of maintenance in the theatre of war, of the movements of his own troops and of those of the enemy. On the other hand, only the responsible commander at the front could decide as to the details of the plan of action, and as to the exact moment when it could be carried out most advantageously. Certain opinions have already been expressed in favour of the contention that the Commander-in-Chief in Mesopotamia should himself have assumed the command of the troops on the Tigris front, where he would have had at first hand the information on which he must solve this difficult problem. Actually the decision rested to some extent with Sir Percy Lake and to a larger extent with Sir Fenton Aylmer; and this divided responsibility involved the very long telegraphic correspondence that has been quoted. In addition, the Commander-in-Chief in India and the authorities at the War Office offered certain advice on this question.

The problem as to whether General Aylmer should attempt to effect the relief of the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah before

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or after the arrival of the reinforcements that were being hurried to Mesopotamia was, as has been shown, one of great complication. As is so often the case in war, it could be resolved into a matter of time: would time best be gained by early action or by delay? As is also usual, criticism after the event would not be difficult; for if the commander of the Tigris Corps were to fail after waiting for reinforcements, there would be many who would deplore that he had not advanced at once; while if his new effort were made before the reinforcements came to hand, and if it proved to be unsuccessful, his rashness in advancing before he received these accessions of strength could be censured.

General Townshend had recently reported that the garrison and inhabitants of Kut-al-Amarah would starve unless relieved ten days before the 17th April, since to bring up supplies after the relief had been effected would require ten days. Further, scurvy and beri-beri had appeared among the troops, and the floods were now expected to begin early in March. Apparently, then, the offensive must for these reasons, and as had been suggested by Sir Beauchamp Duff, take place not later than the middle of March. Whether it should be delivered at that or an earlier period was a most difficult question. In principle a force can never be too strong for battle; but, as strength in battle is relative, it would evidently be unwise to postpone action in order to gain an accession of strength if, in the meanwhile, the enemy obtained a still greater accession. Whether this would or would not be the case depended largely on factors beyond the control of the British commanders in Mesopotamia. For, apart from the influence of the elements on the movements of the ocean-shipping and of the river-steamers, and also on the tactical situation, the strength and actions of the Turks must, in addition, be affected by considerations in regard to the forces that could be maintained round Kut-al-Amarah, by the operations of the Russians in Asia Minor, where a great victory had just been gained by the Grand Duke Nicholas at

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Erzeroum on the 16th February, by the movements of the Russian forces in Persia, where an advance was again in progress on Karmanshah, and by the general situation in Europe. It was computed, for instance, that the Turkish forces in Europe and on the west coast of Asia Minor were larger than was necessary for local requirements, as were also, at the moment, those in Syria and at Aleppo, unless an offensive against Egypt were in contemplation. Turkish reinforcements, therefore, could be sent from the west to other theatres, but, in the circumstances, were more likely to be despatched to the Caucasus than to the Tigris front.

In every problem there is, however, usually one governing factor, and it is suggested that in Mesopotamia the governing factor at this period, so far as the British were concerned, was facility of manœuvre. It was hardly possible for the British to accumulate on the Tigris an army sufficiently powerful in every respect, and especially in artillery, to drive its way through the enemy's entrenchments in time to effect the relief of Kut-al-Amarah. The relief, therefore, must, if completed at all, be effected by a combination of force and manœuvre. If this conception is correct, it may be concluded that a fresh effort should have been made before the arrival of the season of flood, and also before the enemy were enabled to throw up entrenchments on the right bank as secure from envelopment as were those at Hannah.

The tactical aspects of the problem may now be considered in greater detail. The Turks, as had been pointed out by General Gorringe, had placed their army astride a great river, and a march of about 50 miles must either be made before troops from Hannah could reach the Sinn position on the right bank in force, and vice versa; or they must be ferried over the Tigris below Kut-al-Amarah, a comparatively slow process. The central reserve at Shumran was also 20 miles from the Es Sinn lines on the right bank, and 30 from Hannah. There was some difference of opinion both as to the strength of the enemy forces in

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Mesopotamia—which were estimated at from 40,000 to 50,000 —and as to that of the troops at the front. In a telegram of the 20th February General Townshend had stated that, according to his calculations, the total of the Turkish forces standing down-stream of Kut-al-Amarah did not exceed 17,000, and that only from 3,000 to 4,000 were carrying on the blockade. According to General Aylmer's estimates there were from 15,000 to 18,000 infantry at the Hannah or Es Sinn right-bank positions, 5,000 were blockading Kut-al-Amarah, and the reserve at Shumran consisted of from 3,000 to 4,000 men, but would gradually be raised to 10,000 by the arrival of new units. The staff at the Headquarters of the force calculated that the 51st and 52nd Divisions, numbering 11,000 men with 30 guns, were at Hannah; the 2nd Division, one regiment of the 35th Division, and a mounted brigade were at the right-bank Es Sinn position, totalling perhaps 11,000 men with 24 guns; and that there were, in the area round Kut-al-Amarah, the 45th Division and the 35th Division (less one regiment) with a strength of 6,500 men and 24 guns.

Speaking generally, it seems that at this period the Turks were content to rely on the support of entrenchments and natural features for the achievement of their purpose. Unless the British were sufficiently strong to carry these positions by direct attack, which was not the case, they must therefore in all probability also enlist the assistance of these physical factors, or tempt or oblige the enemy to leave their entrenchments. One method of drawing the enemy into the open would have been to feign to retreat. This, however, was rendered impracticable by the lack of fast-travelling transport, which seriously reduced the mobility of the British, and by the consequent accumulation of supplies close to the front. In addition, were the British to relax their pressure on the Turks, the latter might deliver an assault on the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah. An alternative would, as had been suggested by General Townshend, have been to advance along the desert route

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from Shaikh Saad, which led to the south of the Umm-al-Brahm, against the enemy's bridge over the Hai at Bassouia; but this apparently was out of court owing to shortage of transport, as was also a march by the swampy road leading round the Suwaikiyah marsh. There remained, therefore, some adaptation of the principle of manœuvring so as to induce the enemy to separate his main forces even more than was already the case, or in other words to send their reserves to one or other bank of the Tigris, and then strike with superior numbers at the less numerous fraction.

If it were true that the Turks could not for any length of time maintain their total force at the front, General Aylmer might have pushed his lines forward on the right bank and formed field depots of supplies and ammunition for his troops, if the ammunition and food at his disposal were sufficient for this purpose; at the moment he had in hand rations for 13 days for the British and 11 days for the Indian troops. He might then have exerted such pressure both against the Hannah and Es Sinn right-bank positions as would have obliged the enemy to employ all their forces to resist his attacks. In a few days the Turks might have been constrained by the fear of starvation and of shortage of ammunition to draw closer to their advanced base at Shumran; and the British might have been able to take advantage of this retrograde movement to hustle them out of their backward positions before they had time to settle there. Or, better still, the British might defeat the Turkish rearguards and throw them in disorder on the remainder.

Another alternative would have been to attack one or other of the divided portions of the Turkish army so strongly as to oblige the enemy to concentrate their principal forces in this locality. General Aylmer might then have transferred troops across to the other bank of the river, which he could have done more quickly than the enemy, and then have attacked and endeavoured to defeat the weaker part of the enemy's army before direct assistance could be rendered to it. The obvious objection to a plan

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of this character is that long marches must be made, a severe strain is imposed on the troops, and complicated manœuvres must be undertaken with the consequent probability of failure or at least of serious error in their execution. Further, the force left to contain the larger portion of the enemy's army may get into such difficulties as to necessitate the abandonment of the plan.

A somewhat similar but less involved method would have been to trust to demonstrations by a weak force to hold fast a stronger body of the enemy, while with the remainder an attack was made on the residue of the enemy's army. Or, again, the British commander might have endeavoured by inactivity on both banks of the Tigris to mislead the enemy, and then suddenly have delivered an attack in force on one of the divided portions of his army, in the hope of overwhelming it before assistance could be rendered.

There were, as is always the case, certain advantages to be gained and disadvantages to be incurred in whatever locality the main attack of the British was delivered. The entrenchments on the right bank were less formidable than were those at Hannah, the frontages that must be occupied were far greater, and the Turkish force would therefore either be more weak at all points, or some of the localities would be undefended. This group also was possibly somewhat less numerous than that holding Hannah, the communications with the reserves at Shumran were limited to one bridge, and this provided the principal if not the sole line of retreat. Further, the British troops that were not engaged in the main attack should find but little difficulty in preventing the Turkish forces from advancing from the narrow frontage of the Hannah entrenchments, unless they broke out over the Suwaikiyah marsh; for to issue from the defile would be as troublesome as to force a passage through it. On the other hand, the Turkish force on the right bank was at some distance from the British, who, if an unexpected attack were made, would be fighting

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at a distance of 10 or 15 miles from their advanced base. As General Aylmer had only 1,085 carts, about 2,300 draught animals, and 3,600 pack animals, and additional transport could not apparently now be obtained from local sources, he would then find it difficult to maintain a proper supply of food and ammunition. Moreover, since much of the ground that must be traversed by the attacker was also broken up by irrigation channels, which would afford ready-made cover for the defenders and enable them to delay a successful forward movement, reserves from Shumran or from the left bank might be given time in which to reach the front and meet an attack. In addition, the ever-present Arabs would be able to harass the outer flank of the attacking force, and delay enveloping or outflanking manœuvres, as had been the case at the battle of Shaikh Saad. If, however, the British were to close deliberately on the Es Sinn right-bank position, forming field depots as they advanced, the element of surprise would be abandoned; and as the British would lose power of manœuvre owing to the distance that would separate their two groups, the Turks could, in this case, divide their forces with less risk, hold both the lines on both banks in strength, and retain a small reserve.

If there was much to be said for an advance against the Es Sinn right-bank positions, there were also arguments to be marshalled in favour of another attack on Hannah. In the first place, larger numbers could conveniently be employed, for since the enemy's troops on the right bank were at some distance from the British lines, a counter-attack on this flank could not at earliest materialise until some time after a British assault had been launched on the entrenchments at Hannah. A comparatively small force, therefore, would at first be sufficient to secure the camps at Wadi and Orah and the shipping from an attack. There would, moreover, be little fear of the serious intervention of the Arabs on the left bank of the river. The British positions on the left bank were also much nearer the enemy's

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lines, and there were units on the right bank now so placed as to be able to take the Turkish positions completely in reverse. Again, the British might be able to ferry troops over the Tigris to the west of Hannah, where the right bank of the river commands the left; and although there were adverse reports as to the possibility of passing guns and cavalry over the Suwaikiyah marsh, there was still at least some probability that it could be traversed by infantry. It might be possible, therefore, to surprise the enemy by sending a force across the river or through the marsh; and if this were successful, and the Turks did not evacuate their position, they might find themselves definitely cut off from Shumran. Alternatively a Turkish retreat from Hannah would, by day at any rate, be carried out under the enfilading fire of such British batteries as were placed on the right bank. The Turkish reserves at Shumran were also not only much further from Hannah than from Es Sinn right bank, but their advance during daylight could be impeded by the British artillery on the right bank of the Tigris. On the other side there was the formidable nature of the Turkish position and the strength of its garrison; to advance over the Tigris or marsh would be hazardous, and heavy losses would be incurred in the event of failure.

It seems that, in pursuance of his plan of operating by the right bank, General Aylmer now resolved to push forward the British left from the Sannah locality, which had recently been entrenched, to the vicinity of the Abu Rumman mounds, with the object of approaching nearer to the right-bank Es Sinn position. In order to confuse the enemy and to force them to disclose their dispositions and either to strengthen or abandon his forward position on the left bank, a feint was, in addition, to be made against the Hannah entrenchments. On the 19th February orders were issued accordingly that, on the 21st—the date was subsequently altered to the 22nd—operations were to be undertaken with the object of causing the greatest amount

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of harm to the enemy in his main camp behind the Hannah position. Practically the whole of the British force was to take part in the action, and, whatever information was gained as to the enemy, the strength of the Tigris force would, at any rate, be displayed.

All tents in the British camps were to be struck so as to produce the impression that an advance was contemplated; a special objective was given for the fire of every gun, and 50 rounds were to be expended per weapon. The troops were to be divided into four groups, and of these the principal group was to be under General Gorringe, the Chief Staff Officer of the Corps, who was temporarily to abrogate staff for executive duties—an arrangement which, while possessing some evident drawbacks, does not seem to have had compensating advantages. Gorringe was to command: the Cavalry Brigade (less two squadrons); the 3rd Division, under Major-General H. D'U. Keary, consisting of the 7th, 8th, and 9th Infantry Brigades, one troop of the 16th Cavalry, the 34th Pioneers, the 20th and 21st Sappers and Miners, and the 4th Field Artillery Brigade, which had recently reached the front and consisted of the 7th, 14th, and 66th 18-pounder Field Batteries; the 36th Infantry Brigade, the 28th Field Battery, the 60th 4·5-inch Field Howitzer Battery, and the 23rd Mountain Battery (less one section); a total of some 9,000 bayonets, 1,300 sabres, and 38 guns. The infantry of this force were to advance westwards along the right bank of the Tigris from the Sannah canal as far apparently as the Abu Rumman mounds, and were at the same time to throw up trenches along the bank of the river. The artillery were to shell the Turkish camp standing to the west of Hannah and were to endeavour to secure a position for this purpose 4,500 yards to the south of it.

On the left bank there were to be three independent groups. The first of these, under Major-General Sir George Younghusband, was to consist of the 19th and 28th Infantry Brigades, the 16th Cavalry (less one troop), the 107th

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Pioneers, number 3 Company of Sappers and Miners, the 61st 4·5-inch Field Howitzer Battery (less one section), the 1/1st and 1/3rd 15-pounder Sussex Field Batteries, the 72nd and 77th Heavy 5-inch Howitzer Batteries, and one section of the 104th Heavy Battery; about 5,000 bayonets, 250 sabres, and 22 guns. General Younghusband's troops were to display as much activity as possible in order to cause the enemy to believe that an assault was in contemplation. If the Turks abandoned the Hannah position, the British must be ready to follow them, but preparations must also be made against a counter-attack on the part of the enemy.

On the right of and some 5 miles from Younghusband's group were to be the 21st Infantry Brigade, two squadrons of the Cavalry Brigade, and the 20th Field Battery; or about 2,000 bayonets, 200 sabres, and 6 guns under Brigadier-General C. E. de M. Norie. And to this detachment was confided the duty of menacing the enemy's left flank by making as if it were intended to advance over the Suwaikiyah marsh.

Brigadier-General G. B. H. Rice, with the 35th Infantry Brigade, the 12th and 13th Companies of Sappers and Miners, one section of the 61st Field Howitzer Battery, or a force of about 1,700 bayonets and 2 guns, was to secure the camps and the bridges over the Tigris and Wadi, but was also to co-operate in the demonstrations. The gunboats *Mantis*, armed with 6-inch guns, which had come from Egypt, *Mayfly*, *Sawfly*, *Gadfly*, and *Dragonfly*, sister ships to the *Firefly*, were to form a reserve, lying at first below the bridge over the Tigris at Wadi.

Early on the 22nd February one of the three aeroplanes now in possession of the Turks came over and threw bombs on to the British camps, causing a few casualties, and later on two others also flew over our troops. The British bombardment opened at 6.30 a.m., and at first a good deal of confusion was caused in the camp behind the Hannah lines; the animals stampeded and some losses were inflicted

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on personnel. The Turks then struck the tents at the Hannah camp, and at Sannaiyat where there was a detachment, and sent them to Nakhailat, and manned the trenches at Hannah in strength. Tents were also put down by the troops on the right bank holding the line from the Es Sinn banks to the Dujailah canal, and by the reserves at Magasis. It was observed, moreover, by our airmen that a regiment (three battalions) was moved from the last place to the Es Sinn banks, a second was sent towards the Dujailah redoubt (as this new work was now called by the British), and a third was held in hand. A number of tents, in addition, were struck on both banks of the Tigris above Kut-al-Amarah, and a regiment paraded at Shumran.

During the day General Gorringe's troops gained the Abu Rumman mounds without encountering opposition, and occupied the right bank of the Tigris up to this locality. In the evening General Aylmer, who was well satisfied with the results of the action, telegraphed to General Headquarters that the Turks on both banks had been thoroughly alarmed, and that it was his intention to continue to harass the enemy and oblige him to show his hand; and Sir Percy Lake subsequently signified his full approval of this decision. On the night of the 22/23rd the Turks retaliated by bringing a strong fire to bear on the British troops who were holding the Liquorice village, but did not deliver an attack; and perhaps the demonstration was made with the object of showing that they were ready to meet any attempt by the garrison to break out of Kut-al-Amarah.

Sir Fenton Aylmer was still sanguine on the 23rd as to the results that would be produced by the bombardments. He now informed General Headquarters that it had been decided to hold, with the troops of the 3rd Division, the forward position that had been reached on the right bank, and that an infantry brigade with the Cavalry Brigade would be posted some 5,000 yards to the south of the Umm-al-Uruk. A reconnaissance, he stated, was again

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being made of the Suwaikiyah marsh, with the object of finding out whether troops could be sent across it for the purpose of cutting the enemy's line of retreat. It had, said General Aylmer in conclusion, been ascertained by means of aerial reconnaissance that the enemy were engaged in strengthening the Es Sinn positions, and that only a few troops were at Sannaiyat; and it was his impression that the Turks would evacuate Hannah as soon as their guns could be withdrawn.

Sir Percy Lake again approved of this policy, and, although General Gorringe was slightly wounded on the 23rd while making a personal reconnaissance, the demonstration was continued until the 27th. Meanwhile reconnaissances were carried out on both sides of the Umm-al-Brahm, and it was ascertained that the country to the west of it was suitable for the movement of all arms. Wells, also, were sunk, or old wells that had been used by the Arabs cleaned, for the use of the troops of the 3rd Division, who, owing to the fire of the Turks, were in difficulties as to obtaining water from the Tigris, and arrangements were put in hand to pump up water from this river for the animals. The Turks, on the other hand, busied themselves with throwing up works along the left bank of the Tigris facing those of the British.

On the 24th February, with the object of gaining a position on the flank of the Turkish trench at Sannaiyat, some units of the 3rd Division moved out in the direction of Bait Issah, from which a few mounted men were driven. General Norie's detachment, besides harassing the Turks, also made exhaustive trials for the purpose of determining whether troops who were fully equipped could cross the Suwaikiyah marsh, and if so at what pace. It was found that men could wade at the rate of about three-quarters of a mile an hour, and that pack animals could move a good deal faster. On the other hand, a fully equipped man soon became exhausted. After carrying out certain movements with the object of causing the Turks to think

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that the detachment had been reinforced, General Norie sent a portion of his infantry, without their packs or great-coats and without pack animals, across the marsh towards the enemy's left on the afternoon of the 25th. The Turks, who had already constructed some entrenchments facing the marsh, made no movement to oppose the advance, but two field guns fired on our troops as they fell back. On the 26th the enemy began to improve and strengthen the trenches on this flank, and Norie's force returned to Wadi on the 27th. The demonstrations, which had perhaps been too marked to be the preliminary of an attack on the Hannah lines, and had also, by causing the Turks to extend their entrenchments, put out of court any possibility of crossing the Tigris to the west of Hannah, then came to an end.

Meanwhile two heavy guns were, it was said, being moved eastwards along the left bank by the Turks, a large number of troops had been sent to Sannaiyat, entrenchments were being excavated from a point near Bait Issah towards the Sinn Abtar redoubt, and the presence of the *Firefly*, which had been captured by the Turks at Umm-al-Tumal, two steamers, nine barges, six boats, and eight pontoons had been noted by our airmen at Shumran.

On the 25th February General Aylmer had telegraphed to General Headquarters that he was most anxious to launch the attack along the right bank before the river rose in flood, but was much in need of another infantry brigade, the presence of which would give him a good chance of gaining a marked success over the enemy. The moment had come, he now said, when all the infantry that could be sent from Basrah were required at the front, and the troops would be too late if they arrived on the 15th March. Fortunately the force in Mesopotamia had, at this juncture, begun to receive the much-needed additions to its fleet of river-steamers, although a number of the vessels that had been sent from India, Egypt, and elsewhere had been lost on the voyage to Basrah. Sir Percy Lake, therefore, was

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able to promise that three battalions of the 37th Infantry Brigade from India, under Brigadier-General F. J. Fowler, namely, the 1/4th Somerset Light Infantry, the 36th Sikhs, and the 1/2nd Gurkhas, would be shipped forthwith with their first-line transport. The 38th, the leading infantry brigade of the 13th Division, would follow—it began to embark at Basrah for the front on the 2nd March ; and within the next few days 2,500 British drafts would reach Wadi together with the balance of the 13th Field Artillery Brigade. (Details as to the distribution of the British force at the end of February are given in Appendix V.)

On the evening of the 26th February Aylmer sent a telegram to Townshend, which was repeated to General Headquarters, giving a summary of his plan of attack, as then formulated. In this it was stated that a force of six infantry brigades would, in eight or nine days' time, make an advance by night from the forward positions at Umm-al-Uruk, and would first move due south until a point had been reached to the east of the right flank of the portion of the enemy's position lying between the Sinn Abtar and Dujailah redoubts. Two brigades would then attack at dawn the flank of this position, two more would march round the Turkish flank at the Dujailah redoubt with the object of engaging the enemy's local reserves, and the two remaining brigades would follow as the British reserve, ready either to assist the troops who were outflanking the position or to meet Turkish reserves advancing over the Hai from Shumran or by any other route. At the same time one brigade would carry out a demonstration in a south-westerly direction from the advanced positions at Abu Rumman against the front of the Es Sinn line on the right bank. The manner in which General Townshend was to co-operate in this attack would depend on local circumstances, but certain suggestions were made for his consideration. The heavy guns of the place might, for instance, fire on any hostile troops that endeavoured to pass the bridge over the Hai. Lighter guns might engage favourable

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targets on the right bank of the Tigris. An infantry brigade might be sent over the Tigris in mahailas, or a sortie might be made to the north of the town, if the investing forces were much reduced in numbers.

In replying to this message General Townshend promised to do his best to co-operate with the relieving force, and reported that the garrison would be divided into three groups for this purpose. There would be two minimum detachments, one under General Delamain holding the north-west section of the defences, and the other under General Hoghton in the north-east section. The main force, consisting of the 30th Infantry Brigade, together with the 2nd Norfolk, the 1st Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, the 22nd Punjabis, and the 48th Pioneers, would be placed on the outskirts of and to the south-east of the town of Kut-al-Amarah.

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CHAPTER V

THE BATTLE OF THE DUJAILAH REDOUBT

THE weather on the Tigris front had been rainy on the 29th February, and rain again fell on the 1st March, when the ground became almost impassable for troops. The enemy, who seem to have had a shrewd suspicion that operations for the relief of Kut-al-Amarah were again in contemplation, now followed up several air-raids by dropping forty bombs on the town. At the same time it was vigorously shelled by twenty-three guns, one heavy battery and one new field battery being employed in the bombardment. This added somewhat to the casualties suffered by the garrison, which had, since the beginning of the siege, amounted almost to 3,000 men killed and wounded.

On the 3rd and 4th March certain comments and suggestions in regard to the disposition of Aylmer's forces were received from Sir Percy Lake, for little change had been made in them since the 22nd February. The Commander-in-Chief now pointed out that the concentration of the bulk of the infantry of the Tigris Corps on the right bank must necessarily warn the enemy as to the intentions of the British. It was suggested, therefore, that it might be possible to mislead the Turks by marching troops openly to the left bank and making a feint of attacking the positions at Hannah. Sir Percy also observed that both the Commander-in-Chief in India and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff had inclined to the opinion that the attack should not be delivered until the end of March, although he himself was doubtful as to whether it would be wise to

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postpone the commencement of active operations later than the 15th of the month.

General Aylmer at once replied that everything possible was being done to deceive the enemy as to the objective. He then went on to say: "I am sure you will realise that the difficulty lies in the distance to be traversed by my troops in an attack on the enemy's right flank. This was the principal object of my advance from Wadi to Uruk by the right bank, which saves 7 miles. From Wadi a good part of the force would have to go some 28 miles by night and day and fight a severe battle. It would be beyond the powers of a good many. It is not easy to make a feint of attacking the Hannah position, as we are only 300 yards from the front trenches, but I am demonstrating to the north and will have bombardment before advance. I have fixed the night of the 5/6th for our night march and attack at dawn." In regard to the question of postponing the date of the offensive, General Aylmer stated that the Turks were daily strengthening their position; that the 52nd Division was now on the left bank in the area opposite to the Es Sinn banks; and that there were fourteen rafts in this locality. He then observed that he did not propose to make a further postponement unless ordered to do so. "We have a good opportunity now, and if we postpone matters and then are faced with insurmountable difficulties such as floods, it would be an eternal reproach to everyone concerned." The result of these representations was that Aylmer was left to make the attack in his own time and by his own methods. As matters stood, however, the offensive could not have been postponed unless Townshend's troops were placed on half-rations; for, on the 4th March, he reported that, after all the barley had been collected, it was found to be 200 tons short of the quantity that had been estimated, and, in the circumstances, the garrison could hold out only up to the 31st March.

The area on the right bank of the Tigris over which the battle was to be fought consisted of a plain much intersected

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near the river by canals and watercourses; but when seen from the air, which was our only means of forming an estimate of the ground, and of mapping it, the panorama was somewhat misleading, since the various canals seemed to be much larger and deeper than was really the case. (See Map II.) Inland the ground was in places quite level, as, for instance, that between the ruined hut and the point X, which was at times covered by inundations from the Tigris; in other localities there were slight undulations or groups of small sandhills; in others again there were low banks, almost corrugated by the action of water, and also mounds from 4 to 6 feet in height, the relics of a neglected system of irrigation. Here and there were patches of brown soil where mineral oil had risen near to the surface; in other places there were spots covered with a white deposit of saltpetre; low scrub grew where water had lodged near the top of the ground; and the beds of the dry and disused canals were generally overgrown with a thick belt of prickly liquorice. Few features can be said to have been outstanding in such a landscape, but the course of the Tigris on the north and that of the Dujailah to the south both followed ground which was slightly higher than the surrounding country. Between these two the long line of the Es Sinn banks, which were quite 50 feet high at their northern end, broke the monotony of the view to the south-west. The minaret of the shrine of Imam Ali Mansur would also come into sight as the troops approached the Turkish lines, and in front of this there were the two groups of hillocks, each about 20 feet high, which had been crowned respectively by the Sinn Abtar and Dujailah redoubts. These, although commanding large spaces of ground themselves, afforded a prominent target.

The bed of the Dujailah canal was in places, as was found during the battle, not easily recognisable from the area round it, for while the banks were shelving, the canal was from 150 to 300 yards in width but only from 6 to 15 feet deep. It afforded, therefore, some cover from view,

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but was not generally an obstacle to movement, except where the bed and the ground near its banks was covered with liquorice and other bushes, or was wrinkled by the scouring of rain and flood water.

The colouring of the ground, the innumerable banks and mounds, the scrub, and the persistent haze of fine dust and distorting mirage caused by the wind and sun would all combine to enable the enemy to conceal the exact positions of their entrenchments; except when they had ostentatiously been exposed, as in the case of the Sinn Abtar and Dujailah redoubts.

The recent rains had produced some shallow pools of sweet but muddy water on the face of the plain to the south-east of the Dujailah redoubt; and that in the Umm-al-Brahm was also fit for drinking, but, owing to the presence of deep mud along the shores of the marsh, it was difficult to reach. Otherwise the area seems to have been waterless, unless wells could be sunk below the surface of the Dujailah canal, and even these were as likely to give bitter as drinkable water, for the soil of Irak is largely impregnated with gypsum.

On the 3rd March a memorandum had been circulated in regard to discipline during marches by night, and approaches had been made a mile from Abu Rumman so as to enable troops and transport easily to reach the Tigris. Orders also had then been issued by General Aylmer that: "In continuation of the operations which started on the morning of the 22nd February the Corps Commander has decided to effect a crossing over the Tigris on the night of the 5/6th March with a view to capturing the Hannah position." The orders went on to divide the troops into various groups. The first would consist of about 6,000 fighting men with 24 guns under General Younghusband, and these, with the assistance of the gunboats *Mantis*,[1]

[1] The *Mantis* was armed with two 6-inch guns and some machine guns; the others each carried one 4-inch gun, one 6-pounder, and two machine guns.

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Mayfly, *Sawfly*, *Gadfly*, and *Dragonfly*, would contain the Turkish troops holding the Hannah position and secure the British camps and bridges. A group of some 1,750 men of the 35th Infantry Brigade and 2 guns under Brigadier-General Rice was to take up a position on the right bank to the south of Sannaiyat, so as to cover the concentration of the main body. This would *rendezvous* in the following groups at dusk on the 5th March in the vicinity of the Ruined Hut, and be in position at 8.30 p.m. (For formation, see Appendix VI.) The first group, commanded by Major-General Kemball, was to consist of two columns, one named A, and comprising 2,200 men with 6 guns under Brigadier-General G. Christian; and the other, named B column, of about 8,000 men with 24 guns. The second group, commanded by Major-General H. D'U. Keary, would consist of some 6,500 men with 32 guns. In addition there would be with the main body the Cavalry Brigade, under Brigadier-General R. C. Stephen, and numbering some 1,150 sabres with 4 guns. All camp fires were to be left burning, the first-line transport was to move with the troops, and the second-line transport and ambulances would remain during the night of the 5/6th March at the Ruined Hut, but would be ready to move off at 6.30 a.m. on the latter date.

It may be pointed out that in orders that were issued three days later General Aylmer altered the objective of the attack, while adhering generally to the subdivision of the force into various columns. The statement that it had been decided to effect a crossing over the Tigris with a view of capturing the Hannah position and the other preparations must, therefore, have been made with the object of deceiving the enemy. A successful end can no doubt justify these means, but, should failure result in spite of such stratagems, the confidence of the troops in what they are told will probably be somewhat undermined. In addition, if the commander seems suddenly to change his plans without a reason that is obvious to all,

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his men may become doubtful as to the firmness of his purpose.[1]

On the 4th March further instructions were sent out, and in these the commander of the 3rd Division was directed to prepare an entrenched post for a garrison of a battalion with a couple of guns which would protect the water-holes at the Pools of Siloam that had been cleaned and improved by the engineers of the 3rd Division. Bad weather now obliged General Aylmer to postpone the attack for a period of 24 hours, and a further postponement until the 8th was made for the same reason on the 5th March, on which date the *Mantis* first came into action with her 6-inch guns. The Turks, possibly on account of reports from boatmen who had escaped from Kut-al-Amarah, seem to have suspected that some manœuvre was in contemplation, for they suddenly displayed unusual enterprise, and on the 5th six squadrons appeared at Minthar Saiyid Hashim, but these withdrew when the 6th Cavalry Brigade rode out to meet them. General Townshend also sent in a report that large numbers of Turks were manning the trenches that had been made on the right bank of the Tigris to the east of Kut-al-Amarah, and that a couple of battalions and 400 camels had marched down the left bank of the river towards Es Sinn. On the 6th March all Arabs were cleared out of Minthar Saiyid Hashim. During the day the position was prepared on the right bank to the south of Sannaiyat, which was to be held by the 35th Infantry Brigade; and an improvised bridging equipment, which could be used for the purpose of crossing the Tigris or Hai, was taken to the Ruined Hut and concealed there under brushwood.

On the 6th and 7th March the British were in possession of the following information as regards the allied and enemy forces there were in or near the theatre of war in Mesopotamia. The strength of the Russian army that was operating in

[1] The maps used by the British were apparently not quite accurate as regards the positions of the various features, but some of the Turkish works were conspicuous and easy to locate.

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Asia Minor was estimated as being 143,000 rifles, 14,500 sabres, and 296 guns, and this force was opposed by approximately an equal number of Turks. The Russian group that was advancing through Persia towards Baghdad numbered about 10,000 rifles, 9,000 sabres, and 36 guns; but although the advance on Khanikin was being prosecuted, the troops were, for various reasons, moving in small columns on Tehran and other places, and were, in consequence, not at the moment really formidable.

It was believed that the strength and dispositions of the Turkish troops round Kut-al-Amarah were as under: At Hannah, Sannaiyat, Saddleback, Horseshoe Lake, and the Suwadah entrenchments there was the 18th Army Corps comprising the 51st and 52nd Divisions, each 4,000 strong. These divisions could dispose of four 40-pounder guns, eight 15-pounders, sixteen 14-pounders, or a total of 28 guns, 4 of which had, however, been disabled. At the Es Sinn banks, Sinn Abtar, Dujailah position, with advanced troops at Bait Issah and Chahailah, was the 13th Army Corps. This was composed of: The 35th Division, 4,000 strong, which was holding the Es Sinn banks, the Sinn Abtar and Dujailah redoubts, and the neighbouring entrenchments, and had one regiment in reserve; the 6th Regiment of the picked 2nd Division, which was at Bait Issah and Chahailah and could muster about 2,000 men; and, although this was doubtful, there might also be on the right bank five battalions of another division, the 41st. There were 27 guns in these positions, and of these three were 15-pounders, four mountain guns, and one the 18-pounder that had been captured from the British on the Karun. The majority of the gun emplacements were on the frontage from the Sinn Abtar to the Dujailah redoubt, which was also more strongly entrenched than the area to the south and west; but there were seven or eight gun emplacements near the Chahailah mounds. The Turkish reserve was encamped near Magasis, where there was probably a flying bridge or ferry, and it consisted, as was at first supposed, of 500 regular cavalry

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and 1,000 Arab cavalry; but, according to a later report, comprised 4,500 infantry also.

It was thought that there might be about 1,000 men at the Bassouia ford and bridge on the Hai; Kut-al-Amarah was being blockaded by the 45th Division, 4,000 strong, and the 5th Regiment of the 2nd Division, and these troops were also securing the camps at Shumran. One battalion with 60 cavalry and 600 Arabs was at Jasan watching the routes round the Suwaikiyah marsh, there were 200 men at Aziziyah, 600 at Juwaimsah, and a battalion at Ctesiphon; and in Baghdad there were 1,000 cavalry and perhaps 5,000 recruits. It was probable that a large proportion if not the bulk of the enemy's supplies were obtained from Badran, and these were sent on pack animals to a point on the Tigris some miles above Kut-al-Amarah. The only troops on the Euphrates line were three battalions and four mountain guns at Hillah.

As regards the fortifications, it was believed that the entrenchments that had been constructed to the east of Bait Issah, and those at Chahailah, where there were two redoubts, were not joined to the main positions on the right bank, which extended from the Es Sinn banks to the Dujailah redoubt. There were, however, groups of trenches, about 500 yards apart, between the Dujailah redoubt and the Hai; and our airmen and cavalry had recently located a trench near point Y which was apparently occupied at times by the Turks.

In general the enemy's trenches were said to be narrow and deep, many were on the ground-level and without parapets and would, therefore, be difficult to locate; and those possessing head-cover had low parapets which could not easily be distinguished from the banks that had been made for purposes of irrigation or to keep out flood water. Where they existed, loopholes had been so constructed as to oblige the Turks to fire low; and in this connection the men were informed that, at the battle of Kut-al-Amarah, where the British troops did not halt during the advance

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against the Turkish entrenchments, most of the wounds were in the legs and were slight.

General Aylmer issued his orders on the 6th March for the attack which was to be made on the morning of the 8th, and in these he stated that it was his intention first to turn the right flank of the Es Sinn position on the right bank of the Tigris by seizing the Dujailah redoubt; he would then capture the whole of this position. The fighting troops that were to take part in this attack were: The 6th Cavalry Brigade, the 3rd Division, the 28th, 35th, 36th, and 37th Infantry Brigades, the 4th, 9th, and 13th 18-pounder Field Artillery Brigades (the latter less one battery), the 60th and 61st Field Howitzer Batteries, each of six 4·5-inch howitzers, the 23rd Mountain Battery (less one section), and the 12th Sappers and Miners (less one section).

The following formations were to be under Major-General Sir George Younghusband: The 19th Infantry Brigade (less the 92nd Punjabis), the 21st Infantry Brigade, the 16th Cavalry (less two troops), the 107th Pioneers, the 36th Sikhs, the 3rd and 13th Sappers and Miners, the 1/1st and 1/3rd Sussex Field Batteries, each of four 15-pounder guns, the 44th Field Battery of six 18-pounder guns, the 72nd and 77th Heavy Howitzer Batteries, each of four 5-inch howitzers, and the two 4-inch guns of the 104th Heavy Battery; or a total of some 6,500 fighting men, of whom 5,000 were infantry and 300 cavalry, with 24 guns. These troops, with the assistance of the gunboats *Mantis*, *Mayfly*, *Sawfly*, *Gadfly*, and *Dragonfly*, were to hold fast the enemy in the Hannah position, and were to protect the bridges which had been made by the British over the Tigris and the Wadi.

Those of the troops that were to attack the Es Sinn right-bank position who were not already in the areas on the right bank, which were being occupied by the 3rd Division, were to move to these localities on the evening of the 6th March.

At dusk on the 7th March Brigadier-General Rice was to take up the covering position that had been prepared on

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the right bank in the area lying to the south of Sannaiyat, with a group consisting of the 35th Infantry Brigade, which comprised a composite battalion of the 1/5th Buffs and 1/4th Hampshire Territorials, a composite battalion of the 37th and 41st Dogras, the 97th Infantry, and the 102nd Grenadiers; one squadron of the 7th Lancers, one section of the 2nd Field Battery, and a Field Ambulance, a total of about 1,750 fighting men with two 18-pounder guns of the 2nd Battery. The task allotted to these troops was that of covering the assembly of the units that were designated for the delivery of the attack.

The attacking force was to form up facing south-west after darkness had fallen on the 7th, on the ground lying about 500 yards to the west of the Ruined Hut. The position that was to be occupied by each group would be marked by a number of screened lamps, with white lights for the infantry and red for the cavalry column; and the beam of a search-light would also be so laid as to indicate the alignment of the left flank of the force. The troops were to be in their respective places by 8.30 p.m., but were not to leave their bivouacs until dusk—that is, between 6.15 p.m. and 6.30 p.m.

Two columns of the attacking force under the command of Major-General G. V. Kemball would be in front, formed generally as shown in Appendix VI, and the total of the combined group would amount to some 6,160 fighting men with 42 machine guns, twenty-four 18-pounder guns, and two 4·5-inch howitzers. Of the two columns, column A, under Brigadier-General G. Christian, would consist of the 36th Infantry Brigade, comprising the 1/6th Territorial Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment, and the 26th, 62nd, and 82nd Punjabis, two companies of the 34th Pioneers that were attached as a temporary measure, the 8th Field Battery, one section of the 12th Sappers and Miners with four canvas boats, and one Field Ambulance; or about 2,200 fighting men together with eight machine guns and six 18-pounder guns. Column B was to include the following troops: The

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9th Infantry Brigade, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel L. W. Y. Campbell, and consisting of the 1st Highland Light Infantry, the 1/1st Gurkhas, the 1/9th Gurkhas in which was a draft of the 2/7th Gurkhas, the 93rd Infantry, and one Field Ambulance, or about 2,800 fighting men; the 28th Infantry Brigade, under Lieutenant-Colonel A. M. S. Elsmie, and comprising the 2nd Leicestershire Regiment, the provisional battalion of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry made up of drafts for the first battalion in Kut-al-Amarah, the 51st Sikhs, the 53rd Sikhs with drafts of the 24th Punjabis, the 56th Rifles, and a Field Ambulance, or about 2,900 fighting men; the 9th Field Artillery Brigade of the 19th, 20th, and 28th Field Batteries, one section of the 61st Field Howitzer Battery, the 12th Sappers and Miners (less two sections), a Signal Unit, and one and a half Field Ambulances.

A and B columns were to be followed by the Cavalry Brigade, under Brigadier-General R. C. Stephen, and this now consisted of the 14th Hussars, the 4th Cavalry, the 7th Lancers (less one squadron), the 33rd Cavalry, "S" Battery Horse Artillery of 4 guns, and a Signal Section and Ambulance, or some 1,150 sabres and four 13-pounder guns. Lastly, there would be column C, under Major-General H. D'U. Keary, in which were included the 37th Infantry Brigade, 1,500 strong, commanded by Brigadier-General F. J. Fowler, and consisting of the 1/4th Territorial Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry, the 1/2nd Gurkhas, two companies of the 34th Pioneers, and two sections of a Field Ambulance; the 7th Infantry Brigade, 2,500 strong, under Major-General R. C. Egerton, and comprising the 1st Connaught Rangers with a detachment of the Queen's Own, the 27th and 89th Punjabis, and the 128th Pioneers; the 8th Infantry Brigade, about 2,800 strong, under Lieutenant-Colonel F. P. S. Dunsford, and consisting of the 1st Manchester Regiment, the 2nd Rajput Light Infantry, the 47th Sikhs, and the 59th Rifles; the 4th Field Artillery Brigade of the 7th, 14th, and 66th Field Batteries, two sections of

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the 2nd Field Battery, the 60th Field Howitzer Battery, the 61st Howitzer Battery (less one section), the 23rd Mountain Battery (less one section), a Signal Unit, and three and a half Field Ambulances ; a total of about 8,000 fighting men with twenty-two 18-pounders, ten 4·5-inch howitzers, and four 10-pounder guns.

All first-line transport, amounting to about 350 pack-animals per infantry brigade, and the field ambulances were to march with their groups. There would be with each battalion two pack-mules carrying hand grenades, and one cart with each infantry brigade for the same purpose. One blanket and one day's ration per man would be carried on the transport. Each soldier would have rations for two days on his person, and each infantryman would carry from 250 to 300 rounds of small-arms ammunition.

The various groups and columns of the striking force were to march to their *rendezvous* at the Ruined Hut one behind the other in the order in which they have been mentioned. General Kemball's columns, which would be formed on a frontage of about 160 yards and would occupy a depth of 1,200 yards, were to move off from their *rendezvous* at 9 p.m., and were to march along a general bearing of 206° to a point (marked X on Map II) not far from the bed of the Dujailah canal. The cavalry would follow General Kemball's troops and would cover a depth of some 450 yards; then would come the Corps Commander and his advanced headquarters, and lastly General Keary's column occupying a depth of 1,000 yards. It was suggested that the infantry should march in the formations shown in Appendix VI, that is, in successive lines of half-battalion columns of fours, and the guns and transport in lines of small columns of route, so far as circumstances and the character of the ground would permit.

On reaching point X the whole force would halt. Columns A and B were then to move forward in time to reach the bend at point Z in the bed of the Dujailah canal by 6.15 a.m. on the 8th March ; and these columns were to be followed

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by the Cavalry Brigade which was to march in the formations that had been previously adopted. Any enemy encampments that might be encountered were to be cleared.

When point Z had been gained, the Cavalry Brigade was to move towards point V so as to cover the left of column A, namely, the 36th Brigade group, and also the rear of column B. An officers' patrol was, in addition, to be sent out for the purpose of reporting on the practicability of the ford over the Hai at Hamiyadiyah, which lies about ten miles below Attab. Column B, under Major-General Kemball, was to be formed up in readiness to assault the Dujailah position. Column A was to be detached to cover and protect the left flank of the two infantry brigades of column B, which were to carry out the assault; but column A was not itself to take part in this attack. The two companies of the 34th Pioneers were to be held in reserve with column B until they could be returned to the 37th Infantry Brigade, which should be done at the first opportunity.

General Keary was to take the following measures in sufficient time to enable all the artillery with column C to come into action by 6.15 a.m. at a distance of about 3,500 yards to the east of the portion of the enemy's position extending between the Sinn Abtar and Dujailah redoubts. The actual positions to be taken up by the artillery brigades were, however, to be selected by Brigadier-General L. A. C. Gordon, the Brigadier-General, Royal Artillery, of the Tigris Corps, and the guns would then become corps artillery and be under the direct orders of the Corps Commander. The 37th Infantry Brigade was to be detailed by General Keary to carry out the following operations: Two battalions with the machine guns of two and a half battalions were to move forward, the remaining half battalion following in reserve, and were, by 6.15 a.m., to occupy a position in the vicinity of point T, and within effective range for machine guns of the Dujailah redoubt. As soon as the 37th Infantry Brigade had reached this locality it was also to come under the direct control of the Corps Commander. Subsequently

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the two leading battalions were to co-operate in the assault which would be made by the troops of column B. They were, therefore, to push forward, in such time that their advance would synchronise with this attack, to a line within 500 yards of the enemy's position, their left being directed on the southern end of the Dujailah redoubt. The remaining half battalion, however, was still to be held in reserve.

General Keary was also to move one infantry brigade to the vicinity of point S in readiness to deliver an assault against the Sinn Abtar redoubt; and the first lines of the leading battalions and the machine guns of this infantry brigade were to have advanced to within effective range of the enemy's entrenchments by 6.15 a.m. The remaining infantry brigade, with its machine guns, was to be formed up by 6.15 a.m. to the right rear of the artillery in the neighbourhood of point W, but was to be held in reserve.

The commander of the 35th Infantry Brigade, Brigadier-General Rice, was to keep his troops during the night of the 7/8th March in the positions that had been assigned to them. He was then to collect the units and to be in readiness to march off at 6 a.m. on the flank of the second-line transport and ammunition columns, the former of which included a special water convoy of 140 pack-mules, while the latter carried gun ammunition and also 25 rounds for each rifle. These columns were to be escorted to the neighbourhood of point X, and after reaching it the 35th Infantry Brigade was still to be responsible for the measures necessary for their security.

The orders now went on to deal with the action that was to be taken after the capture of the Dujailah redoubt. It was laid down that, depending on circumstances, General Kemball was to push forward the right of his column B along the enemy's entrenchments towards the Sinn Abtar redoubt. The advance was to be covered by the fire of the Corps Artillery, the machine guns of the 37th Infantry Brigade, and by C column, but his troops were not to cross the bed of the Dujailah canal. At the same time column A,

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while continuing to protect the left of column B, would move forward to a position in readiness for further operations.

In conclusion, an outline was given of the measures that were to be adopted should enemy aeroplanes attempt to throw bombs on our troops when in close formations; and it was stated that, after 5 a.m., the Corps Commander would be on the left flank of the Corps Artillery.

In the special orders that were issued to the artillery it was indicated, for general guidance, that as soon as Kemball's men came under fire, the British guns should reply at a slow rate, quickening to rapid fire during the delivery of the assault. When the attacking troops entered the Dujailah redoubt, artillery fire at a very slow rate was to be directed on the trenches lying to the north of it, unless other action were required; but the gunners should be prepared at once to engage any forces that might advance for the purpose of delivering a counter-attack. The Corps Artillery was next to support Keary's attack on the Sinn Abtar redoubt, while Kemball's guns continued to shell any trenches from which enfilade fire could be directed against the British, and the 8th Field Battery played on Magasis. When the Sinn Abtar redoubt had been stormed, the Corps Artillery should shell the Es Sinn banks, while Kemball's two columns attacked them with the assistance of their own batteries. It was notified, further, that yellow screens had been issued to battalions with which they were to mark their positions; and that the firing of a daylight rocket would indicate that our troops were under the fire of their own artillery. The estimate that was framed at this juncture of the number of rounds of gun ammunition that could be expended was as follows: 4-inch guns, 200 rounds; 4·5-inch howitzers, 3,600 rounds; 5-inch howitzers, 1,000 rounds; 18-pounders, 20,000 rounds; 15-pounders, 1,600 rounds; 13-pounders, 1,200 rounds; and 10-pounders, 1,500 rounds.

It seems that the orders which have been given above in summary were the subject of discussion between the various

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commanders and also between them and the staff of the corps. In addition, General Aylmer assembled the commanders and some of their staffs at 2 p.m. on the afternoon of the 7th March, when his final plans were fully explained and various suggestions were put forward and considered. Among these apparently was a proposal that the transport should march in rear of columns A and B, which seems eventually to have been approved, but too late to be put into effect. The question, it is said, was also raised as to whether if columns A and B reached the vicinity of the Dujailah redoubt before daybreak, an attack should immediately be delivered, and this also was sanctioned. In the course of an address which he made at the end of the conference, General Aylmer stated his opinion as to the comparative value of the two armies, and he informed his officers that not only did the British possess a large preponderance of guns, but that the bulk of the Turkish artillery was standing to the north of the Tigris. He observed that he was hopeful of victory, but pointed out that much depended on the success of the night march. Finally, Sir Fenton laid particular emphasis on the fact that it was his intention to effect a surprise; and that, in order to prevent the enemy from forestalling the attacking force and hurrying reinforcements to meet it, the advance against the Dujailah redoubt should be prosecuted with the greatest possible vigour.

Criticism can be made of any plan of action, for some hazard must invariably be incurred; but it is universally accepted as an axiom that the simplest plans are the best, for it is the simple manœuvres only that are, as a rule, practicable in the strain and commotion of a battle. General Aylmer's conception of containing the force at Hannah while delivering an assault against the enemy's right was plain and straightforward; but the manner in which the plan was to be executed involved complications, manœuvres of doubtful expediency, and long marches by the striking force, in some cases during two successive nights. Further, the instructions that were issued for the carrying out of

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the project were both lengthy and full of detail. In addition, the composition of Kemball's force is open to criticism, for it was formed of three infantry brigades which had not previously been in the same command, and were now under a leader who did not know and was not known by the bulk of the troops. No doubt, however, there were good reasons for improvising this force rather than using one of the two divisions.

The powers that have been developed in mankind are said to be due largely to their faculty of gaining new knowledge by means of experience; and the instructions given in the Field Service Regulations of 1909, as reprinted in 1914, for guidance in night operations, had been compiled after analysis of many successful and unsuccessful ventures in the wars that had taken place up to that period. In these instructions it was stated definitely that, in marches by night, "all horses and vehicles should be kept well in rear. . . . The troops employed for night advances . . . should as a rule be infantry with the addition of engineers. . . . Artillery can rarely be of assistance during the hours of darkness. . . . It is not safe to count on troops moving in a preparatory formation faster than one mile per hour." The art of war lies certainly in applying principles to circumstances, and the lessons of experience must often be discarded to meet the requirements of exceptional situations; but it is one of war's greatest difficulties to decide when this can be done with advantage.

General Aylmer's plan of action for the night of the 7/8th March involved the advance over open ground of a column of men and animals about 160 yards wide and perhaps two miles in depth. This column was to move for a distance of about 6 miles, an undertaking which it would not have been easy to carry out in orderly fashion even by day. Further, animals and vehicles were interpolated between the infantry formations, which in any case was undesirable since transport tends quickly to lose distance, and at night this generally involves failure to maintain direction.

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It is possible that this dense formation was chosen, in preference to an advance in two or more separate columns, with the object of insuring that the whole of the striking force should at any rate reach the point X within 5 miles of the Turkish position. If serious delays had occurred up to that moment, General Aylmer's striking force would be in hand and could be disposed of as required; and, having regard to the inactivity which had heretofore been displayed by the enemy, this, therefore, though a hazardous was certainly not an unjustifiable operation. The alternative of an advance in two or more columns over the open ground to divergent localities would, however, have been equally practicable; and although there was more danger that one of the columns would go astray, and that the power of co-operation would then be lost, than when the force moved as one mass, there would be less probability of friction and delay occurring in the movements of the smaller groups.

The formation that was to be adopted in the march to point X was, however, also to be maintained by Kemball's columns during the advance to Y, where fighting was not altogether improbable; and, in these circumstances, a stampede of animals, such as had occurred more than once in the campaign in Mesopotamia, might have been disastrous. As has been stated, it appears that General Kemball, whose improvised staff of two General Staff officers and two Administrative Staff officers, together with the representatives of Services and Departments, had, it may be noted, assembled only on the 6th March, pointed this out at the conference on the afternoon of the 7th. Sanction was then given for the first-line transport (with the exception of the animals carrying machine guns, bombs, signalling and medical equipment) and the ambulances to march behind column C and to remain at point X until day dawned; but the permission was received too late for the change to be carried into effect before the troops had begun to move to their *rendezvous*.

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Again it may be pointed out that, since the whole of the subsequent actions of the troops depended on the punctual arrival of these two columns at the chosen positions, the time, nine and three-quarter hours, that was allowed for Kemball's force to cover the distance of about 11 miles to the place of deployment for the attack on the Dujailah redoubt, as well as for reconnaissance, extension, and the other preliminaries of an attack, was insufficient. Perhaps, then, it would have been more judicious to hinge the attack of the troops under General Kemball on an attack delivered by those under General Keary against the frontage between the Sinn Abtar and Dujailah redoubts; even though this frontage was the more strongly fortified, and was nearer to Magasis and the enemy's reserves than was the Dujailah redoubt. General Keary might have been ordered to engage the enemy closely at the Sinn Abtar redoubt, and to divert their attention, while Kemball completed his dispositions and afterwards enveloped the right of the Turkish position; the Cavalry Brigade meanwhile securing his left flank, or doing this by means of an attack on the bridge at the Bassouia ford.

It can hardly be denied that the orders which were issued by Sir Fenton Aylmer transgressed the principle that an operation order should tell the recipient nothing which he can or should arrange for himself. Generals Keary, Kemball, and Fowler, for instance, were fully capable of arranging the various details as to their operations, which were, nevertheless, dictated to them. On the other hand, General Aylmer may have thought that, after what had occurred at the battles of Shaikh Saad, Wadi, and Hannah, it was desirable to limit the power of his subordinates. But, in doing so, he was, it is submitted, actually reducing instead of increasing the prospect of victory; for, unless the contest were fought out precisely in accordance with his conceptions, which was unlikely, some modifications of the plan would assuredly be necessary. It is commonplace that, so far as leaders are concerned, battle is a struggle of brain and will applying

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the various items that go to make up force. But, instead of being able to devote their minds to the devising of measures suitable to the circumstances of the moment, and in furtherance of the policy of their superior, General Aylmer's subordinates would, under the orders that they had received, be obliged in critical conjectures to devote both thought and will-power to the recollection of what had been laid down in instructions that might no longer be suitable to the exigencies of the case; and, in view of the character of their orders, it was not likely that the subordinate commanders would venture to make radical changes on their own responsibility. Delay and hesitation, therefore, would probably result, and in war these have dangerous ends.

The orders that were issued by General Aylmer were, it is considered, somewhat too rigid and stereotyped for the achievement of success in the ebb and flow of a war of movement; and it is suggested that it would have been advantageous had he given more general instructions, of whatever kind, leaving his subordinates to deal with unforeseen developments that will always occur; and retaining under his own hands a reserve with which to influence the course of the engagement.

Following on the instructions that were circulated on the 3rd March, nine bombardments of the enemy's position at Hannah, in four of which guns from the right bank would also take part, should have been carried out on the night of the 3/4th and on the 4th and 5th. Each bombardment was to have been continued for ten minutes, special attention was to have been paid to the north-eastern portion of the position, and in all about 3,500 rounds were to have been expended. In consequence of the rain the bombardments were, however, postponed until the evening of the 6th March.

The trenches of the 19th and 21st Infantry Brigades had, by the 6th, been pushed forward, on a frontage of about 1,100 yards from the Piffer nullah southwards, to within

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300 yards of the enemy's line; and at 5.30 p.m. effective gun fire was carried out on the Turkish trenches from both banks of the Tigris. Bombardments were continued twice during the night of the 6/7th, and also four times on the 7th, when a good deal of material damage was caused to the works and two lanes were cut near the Piffer nullah in the enemy's wire entanglements. The Turkish artillery was as a rule silent, in spite of the provocation, but at about 3.45 p.m. on the 7th fired a few rounds on our positions.

In order to increase the impression that an assault was to be made on the 8th against the northern portion of the Hannah position or through the Suwaikiyah marsh, orders had been given that a column was to be sent northwards from Wadi. This was to consist of the 7th Divisional Cavalry, a couple of guns, two machine guns, about 300 infantry and a good deal of transport; and was to leave the camp just before sunset on the 7th so as to induce the Turks to believe that these troops formed the advanced guard of a larger force. The column was to march on until night had fallen and was then to return to Wadi. In addition all tents were to be struck in the camps at Wadi. As rumours had been persistently current that the enemy would shortly employ asphyxiating gas, helmets and respirators, together with instructions as to their use, were also issued to the troops.

The bombardment of the Hannah position was continued during the night of the 7/8th March, and our machine guns played on the lanes that had been cut in the Turkish wire entanglements. At 10 p.m. the Turks shelled the front trenches of the 7th Division, and their guns again opened fire during the bombardments that were carried out by the British at 1.30 a.m. and at 5.30 a.m. on the 8th; and at 1.30 a.m., when three rockets were sent up by the British as if they were the signal for an assault, the enemy opened so vigorous a rifle fire that it was estimated that to the north of Piffer nullah there was one man to every five yards

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of entrenchment, and one man to every two yards in the first-line trenches from this watercourse to the Tigris. At 5.30 a.m. on the 8th the enemy also maintained heavy musketry and gun fire for some time as if expecting to be attacked.

Meanwhile the bulk of the striking force had assembled on the 7th on the right bank of the Tigris in the area lying between Orah and the Sannah canal, the 28th Infantry Brigade having moved from the left to the right bank during the night of the 6/7th. (See inset to Map II.) One battalion of the 8th Infantry Brigade was now standing in the Falahiyah loop and the remainder of the 7th and 8th Infantry Brigades were holding the entrenchments which ran south-eastwards from the Abu Rumman mounds for a distance of between two and three miles from the Tigris. Two miles behind the left of this position were the bivouacs of the 35th Infantry Brigade, with which were two guns of the 2nd Field Battery; a mile behind these lay the bivouacs of the 9th and 28th Infantry Brigades, and the 36th Infantry Brigade; and the bulk of the 37th Infantry Brigade with the four guns of the 23rd Mountain Battery were a couple of miles to the south-east of the 28th Brigade. There were seven batteries of artillery near the bridge over the Tigris and to the north of Orah, and one battery was supporting the 7th and 8th Infantry Brigades. The Cavalry Brigade was two miles to the west of Orah. The place of assembly for the night march near the Ruined Hut, and the Pools of Siloam near the shallow trough of the so-called Thorny nullah, were secured by the 92nd Punjabis, who had been sent there on the evening of the 6th with the bridging material which had been concealed under brushwood. The distances that were to be traversed before the troops could reach the Ruined Hut were roughly as follows: 8th Infantry Brigade from 4 to 5 miles, 7th Infantry Brigade 2 to 3 miles, 9th and 28th Infantry Brigades from 3 to 4 miles, 36th and 37th Infantry Brigades from 3 to 4 miles, the Cavalry Brigade 4 miles, and the Artillery from 4 to 5 miles.

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On the night of the 7/8th March there was a two-day-old moon setting at 10 p.m., and, in addition, the sky was at first clear and bright. The arrangements for the concentration of columns A, B, and C worked well as regards the greater portion of the troops, who had formed up at 8.30 p.m. as directed. But some of the batteries were nearly an hour late in reaching the *rendezvous*. Owing to the time that was expended by the batteries in reaching their places in the column, the march did not commence until 10.22 p.m.; and the headquarters of the 3rd Division, which was behind the leading brigade of column C, did not move until about 11 p.m.

The guiding of the march of columns A and B along the bearing of 206° was confined to an officer of the Engineers with another officer to assist him, a bicycle wheel, three pedometers, and an improvised pace stick being used for the dead reckoning. Apparently C column also employed an officer of Engineers as guide in case touch should be lost with the other columns. The march discipline of all the troops is said to have been good, there was neither talking nor coughing nor smoking, nor were matches struck. It was, however, unfortunately in the nature of things that checks should occur, and since in so large a column the effect of a check among troops in front is multiplied infinitely at the rear of the mass, the regular halts were not observed, and the pace behind was not uniform; and every soldier knows that, in such circumstances, during a march by night, the troops in front often suddenly move off at a comparatively fast pace and are then lost in the darkness. Column C was twice treated in this manner by the transport in front of it. In spite of the special precautions that had been taken for the maintenance of touch and direction, A and B columns were, therefore, obliged to halt after having covered three miles in order to allow C column to come up; and the whole did not again march off until 1 a.m. Point X was reached without further incident by the head of columns A and B at about 2.30 a.m., but column C did

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not arrive until nearly two hours later, after a march which had been somewhat trying for the units in rear owing to the constant variations in the rate of movement.

As had previously been fixed, one battalion, the 26th Punjabis of the 36th Infantry Brigade, and one, the 1/1st Gurkhas of the 9th Infantry Brigade, were now deployed into two lines in columns A and B ; and it had been decided that, if opposition were encountered at the enemy's advanced entrenchment, which was now about two miles ahead on the line of advance, the rest of the men should lie down and wait for orders while the 26th rushed the position, using the bayonet only. As soon as B column halted, staff officers were also sent down it to arrange that the pack-mules and ambulance waggons should pull out and remain behind until daybreak, under escort of the provisional battalion of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry (less one company). The deployment of the two battalions was effected without difficulty, in spite of the fact that the night had become very dark, and the men then all lay down. But it was found that the drivers of the transport were now sleeping so heavily that it was impossible to rouse them sufficiently to execute General Kemball's orders. Perhaps, then, it would have been less difficult to send one or more battalions forward to secure the entrenchment, arrangements being made for the maintenance of touch with the main body, which could have followed when the area had been captured or reported to be clear, and for the rapid transmission of intelligence.

Eventually column A advanced again at 3.25 a.m., with the 26th Punjabis, who were deployed in two lines, at 20 yards' distance in front. Then, at 15 yards' distance, came the 82nd, followed by the 62nd, behind whom were the Devons, all these battalions being formed in lines of companies in fours. B column marched 200 yards behind, and the transport animals and vehicles were, for the most part, in their former positions. After advancing for about an hour, the scouts of the 26th came on the Turkish entrench-

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ment, which was not occupied by the enemy; and then to get round it moved about 150 yards southwards. The remainder of the brigade did not conform with this movement, and some time was spent in finding a gap of 30 yards in the entrenchment. They then passed through this gap, but more time was now again lost owing to the fact that it was necessary first to reduce frontages for the purpose of passing through the gap, after which the units opened out to their former frontages.

It was, therefore, not until after 5 a.m. that the head of A column passed the Dujailah canal at Y, when a halt was made in order to allow the remainder to close up. The march was subsequently continued on a bearing of 238° until 5.30 a.m., when, as the first signs of dawn appeared, fires burning in Arab encampments were observed on either flank. Kemball decided that time was not available to drive off these Arabs, so he sent out small flank guards to watch them, and pushed straight on with his main body. The two columns continued to move steadily forward until just after sunrise, at 6.30 a.m., when a low embankment was reached, which was at first mistaken for the bank of the Dujailah canal at point Z.

The Dujailah redoubt could now be seen clearly two and a half or three miles away to the north-west; there was an encampment, apparently of transport or of mounted troops or Arabs to the south-west of it, and Arab tents were also scattered in small groups over the whole area round the redoubt. But there were no outposts nor signs that the redoubt was held by the enemy in force, and only one sentry in fact was visible on the parapet; nor did it seem that the Turks were aware of the presence of the British, although some flares had been sent up from their lines at about 3.30 a.m.

General Kemball was now about three-quarters of a mile from the point Z that should, under the plan adopted by General Aylmer, have been gained at 6.15 a.m. before advancing to the attack. He had therefore to decide

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and to decide quickly on the action that was to be taken.

It is obvious that one of the difficulties of those who undertake to write narratives of events is that they must endeavour to interpret the feelings and mental workings of others in terms of their own; and this under conditions differing widely from those in which the decisions were taken. Before discussing the action that was taken by General Kemball, it may, therefore, be well again to point out that the object to be attained by the British was "to turn the right flank of the Es Sinn position by seizing the Dujailah redoubt and following this by the capture of the whole position." All the artillery with column C were to be prepared to come into action by 6.15 a.m., and at this hour portions of the 37th Infantry Brigade were to be within effective machine-gun range of the Dujailah redoubt.

The columns under the command of General Kemball were probably now covering a depth of at least a mile, the formation was such that extension could, in all probability, not be effected rapidly, and at any moment the enemy's guns might open a destructive fire on the dense masses of British troops; for the inactivity of the Turks might have been assumed as a ruse in order to induce the British to commit themselves to attack in unfavourable conditions. In these circumstances two alternatives were open to General Kemball: he could resolve on the delivery of a sudden stroke, turning or perhaps wheeling the 9th and 28th Infantry Brigades round so as to face the redoubt. The intervals necessary to allow of the extension of the battalions into fighting formation could be gained during their advance on the redoubt, when the artillery also could be moved into positions from which to support the infantry and unlimbered for action. Or B column could take such cover as was afforded in the channel of the Dujailah canal, while A column marched on to secure its left. The usual preliminaries of an attack, such as reconnaissance, the taking

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of bearings, the choice of positions for deployment, and ranging by the guns could then be followed.

Both courses were hazardous, but in different ways. Under the first the attack might fail owing to lack of careful preparation, and if so Kemball would inevitably be blamed for acting with precipitate rashness which discarded the ordinary rules of prudence. In the second case time would be afforded to the enemy in which they could take the measures necessary to counteract the operations of the British. Reserves could be hurried forward to meet them, and it might then be found that the positions were too strongly garrisoned to be carried without such prolonged battering as was not within the power of the British to effect; and should this eventuality occur General Kemball would be accused of wasting the irreparable moments by a deliberation which was as ill-timed as it was injudicious.

Major-General Kemball had recently at the battle of Shaikh Saad shown himself to be a commander of determined character as well as of resource and ability; he had long experience of the conditions in Mesopotamia, and he had a general knowledge of the value and capabilities of his troops. After weighing, no doubt, such factors as the composition of his columns, the loss of direction and cohesion that had taken place during our attacks at Shaikh Saad and Wadi, and the danger of being surprised by heavy fire when in vulnerable formations, as had happened at Shaikh Saad, he decided that time would be well spent in deliberate preparation for the attack, and to place his troops under cover; and all deference must necessarily be paid to this opinion.

It is possible that the restrictive character of the orders that had been issued by the headquarters of the Tigris Corps may have militated against the harmony of thought which must be felt between superior and subordinate if a military venture is to be carried to a successful issue. It must, however, equally be pointed out that surprise was the key-note of General Aylmer's plan of action, and the probability

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of effecting a surprise could not fail to be reduced by the course that was adopted by General Kemball. Colonel Climo's brilliant assault at the battle of Ctesiphon on a Turkish redoubt similar to that at the Dujailah had, also, established a strong precedent in favour of a headlong advance against the Turks. Although Climo had ample time in which to arrange preliminaries, was leading troops who were more experienced than those that composed column B, and had probably to deal with less efficient adversaries, it may be concluded that an immediate attack should have been delivered in preference to the measures that were adopted by General Kemball.

"Faites moi savoir" was the demand constantly made by the Emperor Napoleon to his subordinates, and Kemball now required above everything to know whether appearances were deceitful, or whether there was in reality a small garrison in the Dujailah redoubt. The distance intervening between the British and the redoubt was too great to be covered rapidly by infantry scouts, but, in spite of the formal orders that had been issued, it would have been practicable to borrow one or more squadrons from the Cavalry Brigade, which was now at hand, and send these forward to clear up the situation. No doubt the advance of the horsemen would have disclosed the presence of the British, but, under General Aylmer's plan, this could not fail soon to be evident, and information was now more important even than concealment.

General Kemball, however, did not take this action, and having made the momentous decision to move his dense columns into the shallow trough which was all that remained of the Dujailah canal, he sent a report by telephone, at 6.35 a.m., to the advanced headquarters of the Tigris Corps, which had now been placed to the east of point T, two and a half miles away to the north. It seems that the message was received at about 7 a.m., and was to the following effect: "We have succeeded in reaching bend of Dujailah depression apparently unperceived and are forming up

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troops while brigadiers reconnoitre and arrange deployment. This may take an hour."

While columns A and B had been carrying out their long march to gain the right flank of the enemy's position, C column had, as has been stated, reached point X at about 4.40 a.m. Ten minutes later the 37th Brigade group was directed to march on a bearing of 250° for a distance of about three miles towards point T, and then carry out the instructions contained in the operation order of the 7th March. The necessary preliminaries occupied about half an hour, and it was 5.30 a.m. before General Fowler's men marched off, followed by General Aylmer and the advanced headquarters of the Tigris Corps which halted at the West Ridge.

The 7th Infantry Brigade, which had completed its preparations in the interval, advanced immediately afterwards on a bearing of 258° towards S, the front line being composed of the 27th Punjabis on the right and the 128th on the left; behind these were the Connaught Rangers and the 89th, the brigade headquarters, the reserve of small-arms ammunition, and the Field Ambulance marching in the interval between the battalions. At about 6.30 a.m. the leading battalions began to dig themselves in at a distance of some 1,500 yards from the entrenchments connecting the Sinn Abtar and Dujailah redoubts; and at the same time officers' patrols were sent to the front for the purpose of reconnoitring. The 37th Infantry Brigade was now visible to the south of the 7th, but only a few of the enemy were seen.

General Keary moved off at 5.45 a.m. towards point W with the 8th Infantry Brigade, followed by the artillery. But before doing so he conferred for a few moments with Major-General Gorringe, who, although still suffering so much from the effects of a wound received on the 23rd February that he could not ride, had some days earlier again taken his place as Major-General on the staff of the Tigris Corps.

At about 6.30 a.m. the artillery with C column unlimbered

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two and a half miles to the east and south-east of the Sinn Abtar redoubt, and then began to entrench. Two sections of the 2nd Battery were on the right a little to the north of the Sinn canal with three guns [1] of the 61st Howitzer Battery behind them, next came the 7th, 14th, and 66th Batteries of the 4th Field Artillery Brigade, and then the 60th Howitzer Battery which was to the south of the West Ridge. At the same time the 59th Rifles commenced to throw up a line of trenches to the west and north-west of the northernmost guns, the Manchester Battalion entrenched to the north and north-east of the batteries, and the 2nd Rajputs and 47th Sikhs, together with the 23rd Mountain Battery (less one section), were held in reserve behind the right of the artillery. General Keary also placed his headquarters in this area, and about 500 yards to the north-east of the 7th, the northernmost battery of the 4th Artillery Brigade.

Meanwhile, after detaching the two companies of the 34th Pioneers to act as escort to Corps Headquarters and also to clear and level a space for use as an aerodrome, General Fowler had deployed the two battalions of the 37th Infantry Brigade, the 1/2nd Gurkhas being on the right and the 1/4th Somerset Light Infantry on the left. A few men only were visible in or near the Dujailah redoubt, but it was noted that there were men and animals in the camp lying to the south-west of it. The battalions then advanced towards the redoubt, and a few bullets whistled overhead that were fired apparently by some Arabs from the scrub near the Dujailah canal to the south-west of the line of march. Eventually the two leading companies of the Somersets halted and entrenched on a frontage of 400 yards near to the lip of the Dujailah depression and between 800 and 1,000 yards from and to the east-south-east of the redoubt. The front of the Gurkhas was in echelon behind their right and in line with the remainder of the Somersets, who were facing south-west so as to engage the Arab marksmen.

[1] One gun apparently had been disabled.

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The Corps Artillery opened fire shortly before 7 a.m., some batteries shooting at the camp lying to the south-west of the Dujailah redoubt which caused much confusion and uproar, and also stampeded the animals. Other batteries ranged on the Dujailah redoubt itself.

As soon as the Corps Artillery opened fire, General Kemball gave permission to the gunners of A and B columns to do so. The 8th Battery, which was standing on the edge of the Dujailah depression to the north of point Z, thereupon began to register on the Dujailah redoubt, and also shelled the Arabs, their horses, camels, and followers, who were now streaming westwards from the large encampment lying to the south-west of it and from all the little encampments in the area. The 28th Battery opened fire on the same targets from a position in the bed of the Dujailah canal to the north-east of and not far from the 8th Battery.

At about this period the infantry of the 37th Brigade could be seen apparently to the east of and not far from the Dujailah redoubt; and it is said that Major Leachman, the political officer with the force, also rode up from the direction of the redoubt accompanied by a couple of friendly Arabs, and in doing so came under the fire of our machine guns. After making a report to General Kemball, Leachman and his escort cantered away to the advanced headquarters of the Corps.

General Kemball decided, however, still to act with caution and at the same time to follow the instructions that had been given to him as to the disposition of the troops under his command. He therefore now gave verbal orders that the 36th Infantry Brigade was to move up the shallow bed of the canal to the north-west of Z; it was then to deploy so as to be ready to march on the enemy's entrenchments lying to the south-west of the redoubt as soon as the other brigades had reached the positions from which they were to advance to the attack. The right of the 36th Brigade was to be directed on Imam Ali Mansur, and, after clearing the Turkish trenches in this direction, the brigade was to move

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northwards, keeping touch with the 28th Infantry Brigade. The 9th Infantry Brigade, which was to follow the 28th Infantry Brigade, was to deploy on a frontage of 600 yards with its right on the canal, which the troops were warned not to enter as it would probably be a fire trap. The 28th Infantry Brigade was first to pass the 9th Brigade, and was then to get into a position from which to form on a frontage of 400 yards in echelon behind its left.

At 7.30 a.m. General Kemball's dispositions were notified to Corps Headquarters; and it was also stated that a communication had been sent to the Cavalry Brigade, which was now in movement to the south-west of point Y, asking General Stephen to ascertain whether the trenches on the extreme right of the Turkish line were held by the enemy.

Under the conditions prevailing in the bed of the Dujailah canal, where the troops were apparently still crowded together in close column, time necessarily elapsed before the orders reached them, and some distance had to be traversed before the point could be reached where the infantry were to leave the canal. Time also was necessarily spent in getting the battalions into column of route, and in moving the 28th Brigade past and through the 9th Brigade. But as soon as the 36th Brigade was clear of point Z, the section of the 61st Battery was sent there with orders to come into action to the north of the canal and to engage the trenches lying round the Dujailah redoubt. The 19th Battery also unlimbered to the south-west of the 28th Battery on the right bank of the canal; but the 20th Battery was kept in reserve in its bed. One company of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry was detailed as escort to the bulk of Kemball's guns, and one of the 62nd Punjabis to safeguard the 8th Battery.

When these movements were in train, Kemball sent a report, at a few minutes before 9 a.m., to the advanced headquarters of the Corps that the 36th Infantry Brigade was leaving the bed of the canal at 8.40 a.m. and forming for the attack—actually it seems then still to

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have been in the depression—and that the other brigades were following it.

Although General Aylmer's headquarters were centrally situated and not only within easy reach of the headquarters of the various columns and brigades but connected with them by means of the telephone, it is not clear whether he and his staff were fully informed by his subordinate leaders during the early part of the action either as to the dispositions of his own troops or as to those of the enemy; or whether he did not consider that it was desirable to alter his plans in consequence of the news which came in from the front. It seems, for instance, that the leading infantry units both of the 37th Infantry Brigade and of the remainder of C column formed the opinion that the enemy's redoubts and entrenchments were not strongly garrisoned, and corroborative evidence to this effect in support of any information that had been gained by the political officer would have been most valuable. There is and will always be a tendency for those in front, in the excitement of battle, to forget that the superior commanders cannot possibly be aware of what is passing in the firing line, unless reports are frequently forwarded to them, and that even negative information is of great value. In order to insure that this may not be overlooked, officers from the higher headquarters are often attached to the lower ones, whose duty it is to collect information and either carry or send it to their superiors. It would have been advantageous had Sir Fenton Aylmer adopted this expedient on the 7th and early on the 8th March, for he would by this means have made certain of receiving full particulars as to the situation of his own troops and also as to the information that had been gained in regard to the enemy; and he could then have taken such steps as appeared to him to be necessary in the circumstances. Possibly this expedient was not adopted early in the day because it was considered that the presence of these officers would hamper the commanders of the columns and brigades; or perhaps it was held that officers could not be spared for these duties.

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Very important information in regard to the enemy did, however, reach General Aylmer's headquarters as the result of an aerial reconnaissance, in the course of which the dispositions of the British were no doubt also noted; and, at about 8.45 a.m., news was received that eighteen double (that is large) companies of Turkish infantry were marching southwards towards the Dujailah redoubt, and that the head of this column was about 4,000 yards from and to the north-west of it; a body of 400 men was moving into new trenches that had been made to the south-west of this redoubt; there were 1,500 men at the enemy's bridge over the Hai, and a small column was proceeding over the bridge at Shumran and heading towards the Hai. The practice of our artillery on the Dujailah redoubt was good, but some shells were falling over it. This information was passed to the column and other commanders, and reached Kemball at 9.40 a.m.; and he at once sent the 20th Battery to the south-west of point R for the purpose of engaging the enemy who were marching towards the Dujailah redoubt, and were not visible from the positions occupied by the remainder of the artillery. Meanwhile, at about 9 a.m., he had also received a message from the headquarters of the Corps giving the positions, at 8.30 a.m., of the 37th and 7th Infantry Brigades, and directing him to "push on."

In the interval Kemball's guns had been firing slowly at the Dujailah redoubt and the trenches in its vicinity, and under cover of this fire the leading battalions of the 36th Brigade, the 26th and 82nd, deployed from the canal, each battalion being on a frontage of 300 yards, and the right of the 82nd about 1,400 yards from the bank of the Dujailah. One thousand yards behind were the 62nd (less one company) and the 1/6th Devons, the latter being on the left, and the machine guns of the brigade were on the left of the Devons. The brigade finally began its advance towards Imam Ali Mansur soon after 9.30 a.m.

Meanwhile the battalions of the 28th Brigade had moved in succession from the bed of the depression, the 53rd Sikhs

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being on the right, the 56th, who had only 300 men in the ranks, on the left; these were followed by the 51st and Leicesters in two lines of platoons formed in fours, and the machine guns and bombers were between the last two battalions. The 9th Brigade had also deployed for action with the 1/1st Gurkhas on the right, and the 93rd on the left. The 1/9th Gurkhas formed the second line and the Highland Light Infantry the reserve. The advance of the 9th Brigade actually commenced at about 9.45 a.m., and a few minutes earlier it was observed that large numbers of Turks were filing into trenches or dry canals lying to the south of the Dujailah redoubt.

As soon as the 36th Infantry Brigade had commenced its deployment the 8th Battery was placed under the orders of General Christian, and moving westwards it opened fire from a position 300 yards to the left of the 20th Battery. The advance of the 36th Brigade was unmolested until, at 10.30 a.m., the right had almost reached the enemy's entrenchments, which were not occupied. But now the 82nd came under violent musketry and machine-gun fire from the direction of their right, which caused some loss; and turning, together with one company of the 26th, to answer it, they became somewhat separated from the rest of the brigade. Soon afterwards General Christian ordered the remainder of his brigade, which was then about 3,000 yards from and to the south-west of the Dujailah redoubt, to halt, reporting by telephone to General Kemball the action which had been taken.

The 28th Infantry Brigade, covered by the artillery which had continued to shell the redoubt and its vicinity, had now made good progress, and as it moved on some of the enemy were seen to leave the Dujailah redoubt. But, at about 10.30 a.m., a number of Turks, possibly the same men, were observed to be advancing, and these eventually occupied a series of entrenchments or dry canals some 1,300 or 1,400 yards to the front of the British. From these, as the enemy were no longer under the fire of our guns, an effective rifle

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and machine-gun fire was soon opened. The British troops, however, moved steadily forward, clearing three lines of trenches or canals and causing a body of Turks to fall back northwards. The Turks then made a stand in another locality, again occupying a series of trenches or dry irrigation channels, and their fire became most heavy and telling when the leading lines of the 28th Brigade were, at noon, some 500 yards from these positions and perhaps from 1,500 yards to one mile from the Dujailah redoubt. As a result the casualties were so numerous that, in spite of the arrival of reinforcements, the firing lines halted and threw up hasty cover, the 53rd being then slightly in front of the 56th.

The experience of the 9th Brigade was similar to that of the 28th. As soon as the forward movement had begun, a number of Turks were seen to be marching to the west of the Dujailah redoubt, and these men apparently occupied a trench or canal running nearly due south and half a mile from it. Not long afterwards the enemy, who had probably moved forward in the interval under cover of trenches or dry canals, opened a violent rifle fire from the left front of the brigade; but, although the ground on which the attackers were moving was quite level and without cover, the 1/1st Gurkhas and the 93rd succeeded in advancing by rushes for some hundreds of yards. By about 10.30 a.m. a company of the 1/1st Gurkhas had crossed over to the right of the Dujailah canal so as to meet what was believed to be an outflanking advance by the enemy from the redoubt, but may have been some movements by the units of the 37th Brigade. The two machine guns of the 1/9th Gurkhas and those of the Highland Light Infantry were therefore also sent, with small escorts, to the east of the canal, for the purpose of securing the right of the brigade. The 93rd, who had been reinforced by two companies of the 1/9th Gurkhas, had meanwhile reached the cover of a low bank about 400 yards from the Turks, but here they were stopped. This bank was at first believed to be comparatively near to the Dujailah redoubt, but subsequently the distance was

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estimated as being at least 1,500 yards from it. Not long afterwards the presence was reported of formed bodies of infantry three-quarters of a mile away to the north, and in view of the effect of the mirage it is possible that, as has been suggested above, these were the battalions of the 37th Infantry Brigade and not enemy troops. As a result the four remaining machine guns of the 9th Brigade were, however, moved to the east of the Dujailah canal.

Shortly before noon rain fell for a short period, and this no doubt mitigated the effect of the mirage for a time. At this juncture a request was received from the 28th Infantry Brigade that the battalions of the 36th Infantry Brigade should now be ordered to advance on its left. General Kemball consequently sent directions to General Christian to move the units on the left of his brigade in this direction. Christian therefore withdrew these troops for a short distance, and it seems that in the mirage as they marched eastwards they were at first mistaken by the 82nd for the enemy. After picking up one company of the 82nd (the three other companies of this battalion and the company of the 26th were too closely involved in the action to be recalled), Christian re-formed the remaining battalions so as to face the Dujailah redoubt, the 1/6th Devonshire being in front, the 26th and 62nd in second line, and the one company of the 82nd in reserve. The machine guns of the brigade, which were subsequently joined by this company of the 82nd, were placed on the left flank, as this was now being menaced by the Arabs or Turks, who, covered by the mirage, advanced boldly through the scrub. These men also gave some trouble to the 28th Infantry Brigade, and later on caused a good many casualties among the personnel of the 8th and 20th Batteries.

At noon an appeal came in from the headquarters of the corps that the 9th Infantry Brigade should push forward and capture the Dujailah redoubt. Kemball had, at 10.40 a.m. and at 11.25 a.m., already sent to General Aylmer encouraging reports that had been received from his

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brigades as to the progress of the troops and the retirement of the enemy. He now replied that the advance of the units of the 9th Infantry Brigade had been delayed by the necessity of clearing trenches on their left and meeting counter-attacks, that the 28th Infantry Brigade was about a mile from the redoubt, the 36th Infantry Brigade was moving to its support, and that a staff officer was being sent to the headquarters of the 9th Infantry Brigade to make a report on the situation.

At 12.30 p.m., in consequence of a message which had been despatched from the 9th Infantry Brigade at about noon, Kemball telephoned to the headquarters of the corps that this brigade would be ready to deliver an assault against the Dujailah redoubt at about 1 p.m., and that notification would be sent later as to the exact time when the artillery should deliver intense fire to support the advance. About an hour afterwards (1.30 p.m.), on the return of the staff officer, he circulated a message to all concerned that an assault would be made on the redoubt at 2.10 p.m. preceded by a bombardment of 10 minutes' duration, and that the support of the 3rd Division and of the Corps Artillery was required. The commander of the 9th Brigade now reported that his battalions would not be ready to make the assault at this hour, it having been ascertained that the front line of the brigade was much farther from the redoubt than had been supposed; but Colonel Campbell was told that an endeavour must be made to push forward.

The order to deliver the attack did not reach the 28th Infantry Brigade until after 2.10 p.m., but as the 36th Brigade had not come up and the 9th Brigade had not advanced, Colonel Elsmie sent the Leicesters into the firing line, and gave verbal orders that, with the 53rd and 56th, they were to join in the general advance when it was made. The 51st were kept in hand for the purpose of meeting any attack that might be delivered against the left of the columns.

Before the Leicesters came up, the leading battalion of

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the 36th Infantry Brigade, the 1/6th Devons, however, advanced through the left of the 28th Brigade, and, carrying the 56th and portions of the 53rd with them, the whole made several gallant rushes towards the enemy. In the final advance 4 officers and from 20 to 30 men of the Devons pushed on to within 250 yards of the enemy's nearest trench. It was not until all 4 officers had been killed and most of the men had fallen that the attack died away under the withering musketry and machine-gun fire of the Turks, who were themselves apparently not subjected to a bombardment, as the fire of the British artillery was being directed on the redoubt. The Leicesters, meanwhile, had joined in the advance but inclined to the right as they went forward. After passing through the 62nd Punjabis of the 36th Brigade and also portions of the 9th Brigade, they crossed the Dujailah canal and were then forced to halt by cross-fire from the ground both to the east and to the south-west of the Dujailah redoubt. The Highland Light Infantry, who reached the firing line at about the same time, succeeded in gaining about 200 yards on the right bank of the canal beyond the positions that were being held by the 1/1st Gurkhas, and were then also checked. Another bombardment of the redoubt was made for ten minutes at 2.30 p.m., but as this did not seemingly fall on the Turkish troops who had repulsed the attack, no further progress was made.

At about this time a message, numbered 14 C, was received by General Kemball from the headquarters of the Tigris Corps detailing the action that was to be taken after the capture of the Dujailah redoubt. Kemball had already informed Sir Fenton Aylmer that the 9th Infantry Brigade had suffered serious losses and that the men were exhausted. It seems that he now sent a reply to this latest telegram, by hand through an officer of General Aylmer's headquarters who had come over to him, that the whole of the infantry had been committed to the attack, with the exception of the 51st Sikhs, and that, although strong opposition was

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being encountered from the direction of the redoubt, the attack was making progress.

During the morning General Aylmer had received another report from his airmen, and, between 11 a.m. and noon, he was aware that 1,000 of the enemy were in movement on the left bank of the Tigris near Magasis, and 2,000 were on the bank of the river and were being ferried over it in pontoons. There were 1,200 Turks on the left bank of the Hai, a general movement eastwards was in progress from Shumran, and 500 men were marching towards the trenches connecting the Sinn Abtar and Dujailah redoubts. The bulk of this information was at once circulated among the commanders of the troops. As a result the Corps Artillery, which had been engaging Turkish guns that were shooting from the direction of the Sinn Abtar redoubt or to the south of it, or had been firing intermittently on the Dujailah redoubt and occasionally also on hostile aircraft, was able to shell the 500 Turks with effect as they neared their destination. But, owing no doubt to the fact that only a few aeroplanes were available, no attempt was made to check by bombing the movement of troops over the Tigris at Magasis.

At about 11 a.m. orders also were issued from Corps Headquarters to C column that the 8th Infantry Brigade, which was in the area near point W, was to advance for one mile towards Sinn Abtar, and, should this redoubt be attacked by the 7th Infantry Brigade, the 8th was to follow in echelon behind its right and be ready to give support in the assault. The men of the 8th Infantry Brigade had hardly begun to entrench in their new position when, at about 1 p.m., General Aylmer, who had now received the information that the assault on the Dujailah redoubt was to be made by the 9th Infantry Brigade, and was aware that the 35th Infantry Brigade had reached the field, sent further orders. These were to the effect that the 8th Brigade and the 23rd Mountain Battery were to move southwards behind the line of guns to the left of the 7th Brigade; but

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later the 8th Brigade was ordered to move to a position in support of the 37th Brigade. Instructions were also forwarded to the 35th Brigade at the same time that it was to undertake the protection of the northern flank of the guns, and General Rice accordingly detached the composite battalion of the 37th and 41st Dogras for this purpose.

Meanwhile the leading troops of the 7th Infantry Brigade had advanced their front somewhat, the 128th having occupied a group of sandhills lying at the western end of West Ridge about 1,200 yards from and to the east-north-east of the Dujailah redoubt. The 27th came up into line with them at 1.30 p.m., and one company of the 89th with 4 machine guns moved up to guard the right of the 27th. At 2 p.m. Turkish guns, which had up to that time only fired a few rounds at the brigade, began to shell the 27th and 128th from the direction of the Sinn Abtar redoubt, and as our artillery, owing to the mirage, were unable to locate and therefore to silence these, and General Egerton had received definite orders not to compromise the brigade, the two battalions were ordered to move back for about 1,000 yards. This withdrawal was completed at about 3 p.m.

During the morning the 37th Infantry Brigade had been under intermittent gun fire from the north-west, as well as desultory rifle fire from a belt of scrub lying to the south. At about 1.30 p.m. two companies of the 1/2nd Gurkhas were pushed forward to the sandhills lying to the south of those that had been occupied by the 128th with the object of assisting the advance of Kemball's brigades, and at about the same time the Turkish or Arab marksmen, who had crawled forward in the scrub, began to give so much trouble to the Somersets that a couple of platoons were sent southwards with a machine gun to drive them away. The enemy fell back at first, and the men of the Somerset then halted and threw up some cover. At 2 p.m. the Turks or Arabs came on in force, supported by the fire of a machine gun, and, getting behind the British platoons,

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caused such heavy casualties that the few men who remained were obliged to fall back and abandon the machine gun. After this the enemy for some time closely engaged the companies of Somersets that were facing south-west.

The Cavalry Brigade on the other flank had first ridden to a point about 5,000 yards from and to the south of Imam Ali Mansur. "S" Battery then fired a few shells at some trenches or sandhills that were about 3,000 yards away and were evacuated by the enemy, and also at transport that was moving towards the Hai. At 1 p.m. the brigade proceeded towards the Hai bridge, but, on coming under artillery fire, fell back again towards point V at about the same time that the 36th Infantry Brigade began to deploy for the attack on the Dujailah redoubt.

At about 2 p.m. further news came in to Corps Headquarters from our airmen that a number of the enemy were moving westwards along the trenches on the left bank of the Tigris towards Sannaiyat, that there was bustle and stir in the large camp lying to the north of Nakhailat, and that ferrying was in progress at Madug. General Aylmer appears, however, still to have had every hope that the Dujailah redoubt would shortly be carried, for the order 14 C referred to above was now issued; and in this it was laid down that "as soon as the Dujailah redoubt has been captured the 7th Brigade will push forward and assault the Sinn Abtar redoubt, 8th Brigade will be on their left. . . ." Owing to the failure of A and B columns this attack was of course not delivered, but, at about 3.45 p.m., a message was received from General Kemball, timed 25 minutes earlier, that the artillery were being pushed forward towards the Dujailah redoubt—actually this was apparently found not to be practicable—and that "every endeavour is being made to press the assault home and to maintain the pressure."

It seems that the receipt of this message convinced General Aylmer that Kemball's brigades would not be able to capture the redoubt without assistance, and indeed the

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situation was now somewhat disquieting. The day, which had been hot, was fast drawing to a close; it was very evident that the original plan had failed. The infantry had been under arms for a long period, and in spite of the presence of certain pools of water on the field, to provide water for so large a number of men and animals was, according to the reports of the engineers, not practicable, and many of the men were beginning to suffer from the want of it. The Turks apparently were moving reinforcements over the Tigris, and the delivery of a counter-attack against the 35th Infantry Brigade was not beyond the bounds of possibility. On the other hand, only about half of the British infantry had been engaged, so that all hope of victory had not vanished.

The 8th Infantry Brigade had now reached a point about two and a half miles from and to the east of the Dujailah redoubt; and the grouping of the various brigades, therefore, was such that while the 35th and 7th could adequately safeguard the British right and protect the Corps Artillery, four or five brigades could apparently deliver the most effective form of attack, that from two directions, against the Dujailah redoubt, and this with the support of a converging gun fire. Aylmer resolved, therefore, to make another effort to evict the Turks; and instructions were issued at 3.50 p.m. that an assault on the Dujailah redoubt was to be made at 4.45 p.m. by the 8th and 37th Infantry Brigades from the east, and to General Kemball that the 9th and 28th Brigades (he was perhaps not aware of what had befallen the 36th Brigade) were at the same time to attack it from the south. The attack, moreover, was to be supported by the whole of the artillery and also by the fire of the infantry and machine guns of the 7th Infantry Brigade.

Actually, as General Kemball learnt shortly after 4 p.m., the troops under his orders were not in a condition to do more than hold fast the Turks by whom they were confronted. The 9th Infantry Brigade reported that all

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units had experienced heavy losses, and that it was not considered that the redoubt could be taken unless reinforcements could be sent forward and the advance covered by heavy gun fire. The 28th Brigade, which had now reached the area occupied by two large tents that had been left standing by the Arabs when shelled in the morning, was even less hopeful. Somewhat later a report was also received from the 36th Infantry Brigade that the troops in the firing line were intermingled with those of the 28th Brigade, and that all the infantry were engaged with the exception of one company of the 82nd, which, with the eight machine guns, was guarding the left flank. Kemball, however, passed the order for the new attack to the brigadiers and to the artillery at 4.35 p.m., and took such steps as were possible to carry out the Corps Commander's plan of action; but the brigadiers were told to arrange for the posting of battle outposts to cover the positions that were being held should the attack result in failure.

General Keary, whose headquarters had, at 1.30 p.m., been brought down to the position occupied by those of the corps, had, on the receipt of General Aylmer's instructions, gone in person to speak to the officers and men of the 8th Brigade. Representations were then made to him and communicated to General Aylmer, that the time which had been allowed was not sufficient to permit of the issue of instructions and of a methodical advance over the intervening area. The hour for the delivery of the assault was, therefore, altered to 5.15 p.m., that is about three-quarters of an hour before sunset, and instructions were circulated to this effect.

Colonel Dunsford now deployed the battalions of the 8th Brigade, in first line on the right being the 59th Scinde Rifles, who were on a frontage of 300 yards, with the 1st Battalion of the Manchester Regiment on their left on a frontage of 400 yards and a depth of 1,000 yards. Two hundred yards behind the reserve companies of the leading battalions came the 2nd Rajput Light Infantry; and the 47th

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Sikhs, who were to be prepared to parry a counter-attack from the direction of the enemy's left, formed the brigade reserve. The machine guns of the Manchesters and 59th were placed behind the centre of the brigade, and those of the 2nd Rajput Light Infantry and 47th Sikhs were on its right.

General Fowler, commanding the 37th Infantry Brigade, also issued instructions that, when the battalions of the 8th Brigade came up, half of the 1/2nd Gurkhas would remain in their trenches and cover the delivery of the attack with rapid musketry. The remainder of the Gurkhas were to join in the attack; and, of the 1/4th Somerset Light Infantry, two companies would follow behind the point of junction of the two brigades, but the other two companies—those that were facing south—would be held in reserve behind the left flank and be ready to meet a counter-attack from this direction. At the same time General Egerton sent orders to the 27th Punjabis to move forward again, and this battalion, together with the 128th and four machine guns, was to assist the men of the 8th Brigade by keeping down the enemy's fire.

Covered by the shelling of the bulk of the Corps Artillery, the majority of which fired on the Dujailah redoubt, only the 61st Battery being detailed to engage the enemy's guns which were in action in the vicinity of the Sinn Abtar redoubt and in the area to the south of it, the 8th Brigade advanced at 4.30 p.m. after the men had discarded their packs. During the first 1,000 yards of the advance, where the units were apparently to the south of the West Ridge, the brigade was hardly molested, but the troops then crossed the low ridge and at once came under gun fire from the direction of the Sinn Abtar redoubt, whereupon the companies opened out into extended order. It was, however, only when the leading lines reached the bank of the Dujailah canal that the enemy's shell fire became heavy, and it was now combined with violent musketry and machine-gun fire from the trenches to the north and south of the redoubt,

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which the fire of the Somersets and Gurkhas was unable to subdue. At the same time the men were subjected to the fire of the machine gun which was opposite to the two companies of the Somersets that were facing south. The troops nevertheless went stubbornly forward, but as they passed the canal were met with so intense a fire directed from both flanks along its course that a number of casualties were caused. At the same time a barrage of shells and bullets was made by the enemy across the canal on either flank of the British. At 5.15 p.m. our artillery fire was switched from the redoubt on to the trenches lying on either side of it, and this change of target was followed by some cessation of the Turkish fire. Seizing their opportunity, the men of the Manchester Regiment then stormed the position, and with the support of a hail of bullets that were fired by the machine guns of the 8th Brigade, which were now in position on the sandhills, captured two lines of trenches. Immediately afterwards a number of the 59th and 2nd Rajputs and a few men of one company of the 1/2nd Gurkhas joined the English battalion, and steps were at once taken to consolidate these gains, bombers also being sent out to both flanks. The 47th, meanwhile, had moved more to the right, and, after crossing the sandhills where they came under heavy fire, they wheeled round and occupied the right bank of the Dujailah canal.

As had been the case in other battles, the setting sun was now shining right in the eyes of the men, the atmosphere round the flanks of the redoubt was so thick with dust and smoke that observation was very difficult, and, owing to casualties among those who carried them, the stock of bombs at hand was small and our bombing soon languished. The Turks were not long in grasping the weak situation of the British, and, at about 6 p.m., just before sunset, an accurate and enfilading gun fire was delivered against the redoubt from the north. Under cover of this the enemy made a strong counter-attack on the garrison of the redoubt, using bombs with great effect against both flanks of the

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British. For a time the men of the 8th Infantry Brigade held their ground, but their number was small, there were only a few British officers who had not been killed or wounded, and in the end the troops were obliged to retire. This they did to the cover of the dry and shallow bed of a disused canal 200 yards from the redoubt, the withdrawal being protected by the fire of the men of the 47th Sikhs.

As soon as the troops had rallied, they fell back again through the 47th to the sandhills, and an attempt by the Turks to pursue was promptly stopped by the fire of the 47th and machine guns. The men of the 1/2nd Gurkhas and those of the Somerset Light Infantry who had followed the 8th Brigade also retired to the entrenchments that were being occupied by the remainder of the 1/2nd Gurkhas in the sandhills ; and, during this withdrawal, General Fowler was wounded, for the Turks, although keeping to their trenches, maintained a heavy fire on and along the Dujailah canal and the areas near it.

The British remained in these positions until after night-fall and then again retreated with their wounded. No news as to the progress of the assault had meanwhile been received from the front. A staff officer, therefore, was sent forward from General Keary's headquarters at 6.15 p.m. to report on the situation, and he subsequently brought back definite information of the failure of the attack and subsequent withdrawal.

The efforts that had been made by Kemball's troops had unfortunately also been abortive, in spite of the heavy fire that was opened by the guns with his columns. A little ground was gained by some men of the 26th Punjabis and other units who advanced up the bed of the canal. But even here the troops were brought to a standstill at about 5.45 p.m., when at a distance of 200 yards from the enemy's position, and contact was not established with the 8th Infantry Brigade. A deadlock then supervened, and at dusk the 8th and 20th Batteries, which were in exposed positions, withdrew to the Dujailah canal to a

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locality near to that which was occupied by Kemball's headquarters.

Like Keary, General Kemball did not get early news of the result of the final attack, and, at about 6.30 p.m., he sent off a request to General Aylmer for information as to the situation of the troops of C column, which would probably have reached the headquarters of the corps twenty minutes later. He added that his brigades had been asked to report their dispositions and the state of the fight; and that the Cavalry Brigade, which had referred to him for instructions, had been directed to fall back after nightfall into the Dujailah canal on the right of Columns A and B. This brigade had, during the afternoon, come under the fire of three batteries when advancing towards Imam Ali Mansur, and had then fallen back to point V. Here the brigade remained, although from time to time shelled by the Turks. At attempt by a few of the enemy to advance from the Hai was stopped by the fire of " S " Battery.

As night had now come on, the last attack had failed, and the troops were much scattered, General Aylmer decided to draw off and concentrate his force, and to await events. Shortly after 7 p.m., therefore, orders were issued that the 7th Infantry Brigade was forthwith to entrench on a frontage of some 3,000 yards southwards from point W, and also provide a line of outposts. The 35th Infantry Brigade was, as soon as possible, to take over the northern portion of this line from the 7th Brigade; the 8th Infantry Brigade was to hold and entrench a position to the south of that occupied by the 7th Brigade, and was to furnish its own outposts. Kemball's three brigades were still to remain under his orders, and were to continue the line from that of the 8th Brigade towards the Dujailah canal, but at least one brigade was to be in reserve to the north of point Y. His guns, however, were to bivouac farther to the north and were to come under the orders of the commander of the artillery of the corps. All wounded were to be collected near the transport, and Kemball was to throw out a line of piquets

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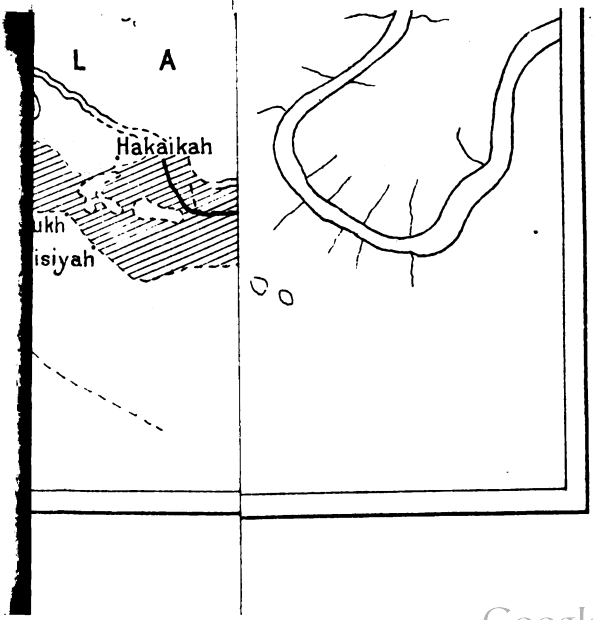

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northwards from his left near Y, to protect the rear of the transport column. The Cavalry Brigade was to move to a position approximately behind the centre of the whole line. Notification had previously been made to the various columns as to the presence and allocation of the small amount of water that was available for men and animals; and it was now again stated that the water lying to the east of point Y was being secured by a piquet of the 34th Pioneers.

The orders did not reach General Kemball until 7.50 p.m., and were acknowledged forty minutes later, after having been passed by word of mouth to the Cavalry Brigadier. Their exact execution, which would in any case have been difficult by day even if the troops had not been closely engaged, was, however, quite outside the bounds of possibility as regards the infantry. The troops were still in close contact with the enemy's, whose fire had certainly abated as darkness came on, although a dropping musketry, which occasionally swelled in volume, had been continued after nightfall. It seems that advantage had been taken of this lull by the commanders of the 9th, 28th, and 36th Brigades to hold a short conference in regard to the policy that was to be pursued. As a result it was decided to hold and entrench the ground that had been gained, to contract the frontage, and to secure both flanks. At the same time steps would be taken to bring up water and ammunition, and to collect and evacuate the wounded.

General Christian consequently called back the 62nd and 82nd and placed them 800 yards behind the front and facing west, and the 26th were posted centrally as reserve to the brigade. The front line, which was also withdrawn for a distance of about 400 yards, was secured by a mixed force of Devons, 53rd, 56th, Leicesters, 93rd, 1/9th Gurkhas, and Highland Light Infantry. On the right flank a detachment of the Highland Light Infantry threw up an entrenchment to the east of the canal, and the 1/1st Gurkhas fell back and became the reserve of the 9th Infantry Brigade.

Between 8 p.m. and 9 p.m. Kemball received reports

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from the front indicating the action that had been taken by his brigadiers. Shortly before 9 p.m., therefore, he telephoned to Corps Headquarters pointing out that there were a number of wounded to be collected who must be abandoned if the withdrawal of the infantry took place at once, but he said that the cavalry would join the main body forthwith. A request was also made for the despatch of staff officers for the purpose of lending assistance in controlling the retirement.

At 9.20 p.m. an order which had been sent out to the commanders of the various forces came in to Kemball from the headquarters of the corps, and this contained instructions that the whole of the troops were to stand to arms at 5 a.m. on the 9th March. At this hour all transport was to be loaded and in readiness to move off at short notice, and staff officers were to attend at Corps Headquarters for instructions. In view of what had been reported in his previous message, Kemball was in some doubt as to whether this latest order was not intended to modify those that had been issued at 7 p.m. At 10.50 p.m., consequently, he sent a reply saying that it was understood that the earlier order had been cancelled. It was pointed out, in addition, that although 700 wounded had been brought in, there were still several hundreds to be dealt with.

At 10.35 p.m., however, orders had been circulated by General Kemball embodying the directions that had been received from General Aylmer; and in these the routes that were to be followed by the brigades were indicated and also the positions that were to be occupied by them, which were in general to face south-west on either side of the Dujailah canal at the locality occupied by Kemball's headquarters. The brigadiers were asked to report when the withdrawal could commence.

These instructions were received by the 28th and 36th Infantry Brigades between 11 p.m. and midnight, and, after consulting together, the brigadiers replied that the withdrawal could begin at 1.30 a.m. But the order did not

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reach the 9th Infantry Brigade until 1 a.m., and Colonel Campbell then sent an answer that his units would be ready to move three hours later.

Although the men of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and 34th Pioneers gave all the assistance in their power, and ambulances and carts that had been cleared of rations were also sent by Aylmer for the wounded, the 28th and 36th Brigades were longer in clearing the field and collecting ammunition and tools that were in the trenches than had been anticipated. These troops, therefore, did not begin to retire until about 2.30 a.m.; and the men of the 9th Infantry Brigade did not leave their positions until 4 a.m. The enemy made no attempt directly to molest the British, but their dropping fire, which from time to time increased into a strong burst of unaimed musketry, caused a few casualties during the night and as the troops moved away.

At 4.30 a.m. orders were sent out by Kemball that the 36th Infantry Brigade was to remain at point Z and cover the retirement of the remainder, and two companies of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry were sent out to assist General Christian in this duty. As soon as day dawned, sunrise was at about 6.15 a.m., the collection and re-organisation of Kemball's brigade was also prosecuted with energy, but even then it was some time before all the men could be sorted out and units reformed.

While this action had been in progress on the right bank, gun fire, in which the war vessels took part, was carried out against the enemy's positions at Hannah on the 8th March; but it does not appear that General Aylmer was in close communication with the 7th Division during the day. After firing rockets at 8 p.m., and again strongly bombarding the enemy's position for five minutes, Younghusband reported that: "Rockets and bombardment drew the Turks successfully. Heavy rifle and machine-gun fire was opened by Turks, also artillery. Manifest that Hannah position is still held strongly and one, probably two, and

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possibly three batteries still in position against this front." At 12.15 a.m. on the 9th a telegram from General Aylmer, which had also been sent to General Townshend and Sir Percy Lake, was received by Younghusband as follows: "To-day's operations terminated in a gallant but unsuccessful attempt to storm the Dujailah redoubt. Troops pushed home the attack and carried out the operation with the greatest gallantry, but the enemy was able to cross reinforcements over from the left bank at Magasis and from Shumran and we were unable to break through. Unless the enemy retires from his present position on the right bank, which does not seem probable, we shall be unable to maintain ourselves in present position owing to lack of water, and unless enemy evacuates Sinn position to-night we shall be obliged to withdraw back to our previous position at Wadi. Casualties have been heavy."

About an hour later Younghusband was ordered to send out patrols as as to make sure whether the Hannah position was held or had been evacuated, since a number of Turks had been transferred from the left bank of the Tigris to the right. In addition, a battalion was to be despatched to the Sannah canal both to secure it and to facilitate the withdrawal of the force with Aylmer to Wadi should this be necessary. Accordingly Younghusband ordered the 107th Pioneers at 6 a.m. to cross the bridge and proceed to Sannah, although this battalion could muster only 350 men, as many were still engaged in pioneer duties. The 107th were to be followed by one company of the 6th Battalion of the King's Own of the 13th Division, which had just arrived at the front. At 5.15 a.m. fire was again opened by the troops under Younghusband against the Turkish positions at Hannah. The reply was prompt and vigorous, although the volume of fire was not so great as had been the case on the evening of the 8th; but the Turkish guns also shelled our line for some time about an hour later, and desultory firing, in which the warships joined, was carried on by both sides during the day.

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General Keary's troops, although not molested during the night of the 8/9th March, had found themselves short of water, as the various pools were quickly exhausted. This fact may have induced General Aylmer to issue, at 5 a.m., tentative orders for a withdrawal. Under these the 7th Infantry Brigade, the Cavalry Brigade (less two squadrons), the 35th Infantry Brigade, to which the 37th Infantry Brigade would be attached, the 4th Artillery Brigade, and the 2nd Field Battery would remain under Major-General Keary to cover the retirement, the artillery opening fire on the Sinn Abtar redoubt at 6.15 a.m. General Kemball's column, consisting of the 9th and 28th Infantry Brigades, and the 9th Field Artillery Brigade, was to take up a rearguard position at 6 a.m. At the same time the 36th Infantry Brigade, the 8th Field Battery, and two squadrons (of the 4th Cavalry) under Brigadier-General Christian were to move to a position about two miles from and to the south of point X, so as to safeguard the southern flank of the force during its withdrawal. The main body, consisting of the second-line transport, the ambulances, the ammunition column, and the remainder of the artillery, was to be covered by an advanced guard consisting of the 8th Infantry Brigade and one troop of cavalry, and was to be ready to march whenever required to do so. As soon as the main body had passed point X, Keary's group would fall back and would safeguard the northern flank, and Christian was to join the main body when its rear had passed the Umm-al-Brahm.

At 6.30 a.m. General Aylmer gave further instructions that the force was to be ready to march at 9 a.m. It was, however, only at this hour (6.30 a.m.) that the original orders reached General Kemball, who then sent a message to Corps Headquarters that a steady movement westwards from Imam Ali Mansur towards the Hai bridge was visible, but whether by baggage or troops could not be discerned. It appears, moreover, that the greater part of the battle-field, and the slopes of the Dujailah redoubt in particular,

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were now covered by Arabs, who seemed to be engaged in looting. At 7.25 a.m., therefore, Kemball again reported that the enemy's camps had all disappeared; that ten shells at long range had been fired at 7 a.m. from the direction of Imam Ali Mansur; but that no movements of troops were visible and it was believed that they had all fallen back. Only parties of marauding Arabs were searching the field, and these were being driven off by our gun and rifle fire. After notifying the dispositions of his troops, he ended the message with the words: "Am I to continue movements of retirement at once? . . . Am prepared to hold on here all day without support."

Meanwhile the Corps Artillery had, at 6.15 a.m., begun to shell the Sinn Abtar and Dujailah redoubts, drawing a reply from the enemy's guns, the flashes of which were visible to the south of the former. Aerial reconnaissance was also in progress, and from the results of this General Aylmer received, between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m., a first report to the following effect: There were no troops or fresh tracks to be seen at the Chahailah mounds, but there was a new trench 300 yards long about two miles to the south of them. Pontoons were plying at Magasis, but no formed bodies were near it, although a few men were moving south-eastwards in the bed of the Magasis canal; there was a camp of 50 tents on its bank and about two miles from the Tigris, and a column of 500 men was also standing not far from the canal. Carts and other transport were moving in both directions between the Hai and the Es Sinn positions on the right bank of the Tigris, the camps were still standing at the bridge near Bassouia, there were 600 men on the banks of the stream here, and one mahailah (barge) and from 30 to 40 small boats on the water. There were six groups of troops near an entrenchment lying between the Hai and the Dujailah redoubt and a couple of miles from the former. Guns were in position near the bank of the Dujailah canal to the south of the Sinn Abtar redoubt and facing south-east, and two new gun pits had been made

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near it. By about 10 a.m. it seems that a further report came in that the Hannah position was occupied in force, but that there were no troops at Sannaiyat. A large camp was standing near the Atabah marsh, and another at the Horseshoe lake, where there was an aeroplane on the ground. Ferrying was still in progress at Magasis.

The situation may now have appeared to General Aylmer to have been somewhat as follows: The British had been repulsed with a loss of about 3,500 men, of whom 2,500 were wounded, who must be carried fifteen miles or more back to Wadi; and for this the transport at his disposal—army transport carts in the main—was barely sufficient even if many of the vehicles that were loaded with rations were emptied and used as ambulances. There was a shortage of water, some men and animals had not obtained any during the night of the 8/9th; the water in the Umm-al-Brahm could not be reached owing to the presence of wide stretches of adhesive mud on its banks, and drinking-water, therefore, could be obtained only by moving to the Hai or to the Tigris. The men had made a long advance by night on the 7/8th March, and the majority had then taken part in a hard contest, at the end of which the night had in many cases again been passed in entrenching or marching. Physically, therefore, the troops could no longer be in good condition. If another attack were made, and if this resulted in failure, the march back on Wadi might prove to be beyond the power of many of the men, even if not pressed by the enemy. Further, General Aylmer's troops must gain a complete victory or fall back soon either to Wadi or to some locality within reach of it; since, with the transport that was available, they could apparently not be supplied with food and ammunition if they remained facing the frontage from the Es Sinn banks to the Dujailah redoubt, unless the Turks evacuated Hannah and in consequence allowed our shipping to sail farther up the Tigris.

The information that had been received in regard to the enemy indicated that they were, in all probability, holding

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a wide frontage of some 10 miles on the right bank of the Tigris, and at the same time had maintained a formidable garrison in the entrenchments at Hannah. It might be inferred, then, that the Turks were prepared again to accept battle and expected to be attacked, and that their reserves had been sent to the front. But it was not impossible that a counter-attack might be made against the right of Keary's group, with the object of separating the British from the river, if Aylmer again endeavoured either to capture the Dujailah redoubt or moved his left westwards towards the Hai.

It is rare when a state of affairs is wholly advantageous to one side and against the other, and there were certain drawbacks in the situation of the Turks. The Dujailah redoubt, for instance, was 3 or 4 miles from the Tigris, and 5 or 6 miles from the Hai, and the Sinn Abtar redoubt was also 3 or 4 miles from the former. It was not improbable, therefore, that the Turks in these localities were experiencing some shortage of water, although this might not be so serious as in the case of the British. It was, indeed, subsequently reported that, owing to the absence of water, the garrison of the Dujailah redoubt had, on the morning of the 8th March, consisted only of about 30 men. The Turkish troops had not marched during the night of the 7/8th March, but such of them as came from Shumran or Nakhailat must have covered a dozen miles at least on the 8th, and probably at a fast pace, and much of the night of the 8/9th must have been spent either in firing or in digging. Further, the Turks were now spread over a wide frontage, whereas Aylmer's force was concentrated and could, therefore, manœuvre more easily. In addition, two of the British infantry brigades and the Cavalry Brigade had done little or no fighting on the 8th.

Success in every contest, whether warlike, or peaceful such as the competition of trade, is evidently gained by the combination of knowledge, judgment, skill, and daring; the knowledge involving a close acquaintance with all the

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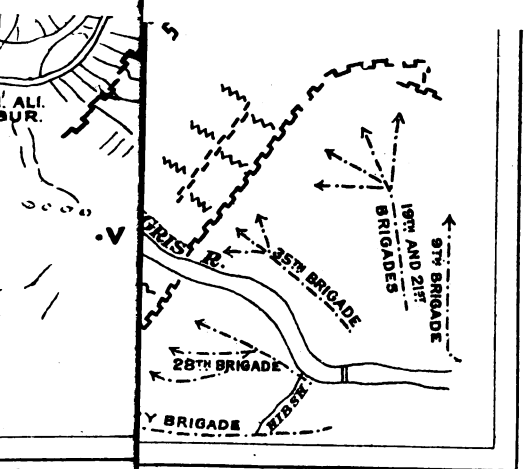

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technical factors, the judgment consisting largely of a correct estimate as to the lengths to which the enemy or competitor can and will go, and the skill and daring in pushing the venture to the breaking-point but no farther. General Aylmer decided that, in view of the attitude of the enemy, the breaking-point had been reached early on the 9th, so far as the British were concerned, and he made up his mind to fall back to Wadi as soon as the wounded that were within reach had been brought in. The decision of the responsible commander must necessarily be treated with all due respect, and, if it was based on the absence of water, the physical condition of the British troops, and on lack of transport for their maintenance, can clearly not be questioned. At the same time it cannot be overlooked that General Aylmer, possibly because he did not wish to commit his troops, did not apparently take steps to supplement by the action of patrols the information that had been brought by the airmen, and to oblige the enemy further to disclose his dispositions. It must, in consequence, remain a matter of opinion as to whether some feeble point could not have been discovered in the long Turkish line, perhaps to the north of the Sinn Abtar redoubt, against which an attack could have been delivered, while cavalry were pushed out from the positions held by Kemball's columns to menace the bridge over the Hai and hold fast the Turkish right. Alternatively, the British might have occupied and entrenched a line extending from Sannaiyat towards the Umm-al-Brahm, where they could apparently have obtained water, and could probably have been maintained as regards food and ammunition; and there awaited a more favourable moment for the offensive.

While the aerial reconnaissance was in progress, the Turkish guns fired a few shells at 8 a.m. at the men of the 36th Infantry Brigade, who were now moving in column of route back from point Z. Twenty minutes later an enemy aeroplane came over Kemball's troops and was shelled by the section of the 61st Howitzer Battery. By about 9 a.m.

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all wounded and baggage had been sent off by Kemball, and at about the same time a message which had been circulated at 8.20 a.m. by the Tigris Corps came to hand. In this it was stated that aerial reconnaissance was in progress, and that the instructions for the retirement of the 9th and 28th Brigades were suspended until further orders. At 9.50 a.m. Kemball reported that the 36th Brigade group had been directed to halt in column of route in the depression behind the 9th and 28th Brigades pending the return of the enemy's aeroplane. Shortly afterwards a Turkish battery opened fire on Kemball's group from a concealed position to the north-west and probably between the Dujailah and Sinn Abtar redoubts. After causing a few casualties, it lost the range, owing probably to mirage, but succeeded in severing the cable by which communication was maintained with the headquarters of the Tigris Corps. When this was restored, a message came in at 10.45 a.m., which had been sent out at about 10 a.m., that the main body was to be ready to march at 10.15 a.m.

Meanwhile the transport vehicles of the force had been marshalled in open order twelve abreast with the ambulances on their flanks. Most of the ration-carts were carrying wounded, such rations as could be loaded on the baggage-carts having been transferred to these. The limbers of the ammunition-waggons were also used intermittently by such of the wounded as were still capable of marching a little.

It was some time before this large column got under way, and at first progress was slow, but except for occasional gun fire the enemy remained passive. At about 11 a.m. the fighting troops began to move off, the cavalry being now on the northern flank, supported by the 35th Infantry Brigade and certain batteries which were in position to the north of the remainder of the troops. Half an hour later the 7th Infantry Brigade received orders first to close and then to fall back to a position to the north-east of the 35th Infantry Brigade. Kemball had by this time sent off the 36th Brigade group to cover the southern flank, and shortly before

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noon the 28th Infantry Brigade also marched off. The 9th Infantry Brigade and the 28th Battery then undertook the duty of covering the retirement, while the other batteries occupied positions in readiness farther to the north-east. The 9th Infantry Brigade was followed by a body of 800 enemy cavalry, some infantry, and four guns, but the Turks did no more than fire occasionally a few rounds, which were answered by our artillery.

The units of the 7th Infantry Brigade were some time in closing, and it was 2 p.m. before they were clear of the 35th Brigade. Soon afterwards General Keary issued orders for the troops under his command to march on a compass bearing of 45°, approximately, towards the Pools of Siloam. The 7th Infantry Brigade was to move off at once, the 4th Artillery Brigade marching to the south of it. The 35th Infantry Brigade, together with the 2nd Field Battery, was to form the rearguard, and the Cavalry Brigade was to remain to the west of the Pools of Siloam until the rest of the force had passed them.

The 35th Infantry Brigade eventually fell back at 3 p.m., and except for an occasional shell that was fired at the rear parties, was not attacked. During an aerial reconnaissance an enemy column consisting of cavalry, infantry, and guns, in all about 1,500 strong, had been seen on the march towards the Chahailah mounds, and this information was circulated at 1.25 p.m. but did not reach Keary until nearly 4 p.m. Somewhat earlier the compass bearing that was being followed by Keary's troops had been changed to 20°, but even so the 7th Infantry Brigade found itself on the line of march of another column of troops and was obliged to halt. The 35th Brigade in consequence began to close on it.

At 4.15 p.m. a number of shells fell on the 7th and 35th Infantry Brigades, fired apparently by a body of troops that had been for some time seen dimly through the mirage moving up from the south-west, but had been supposed to form part of Kemball's detachment. The 2nd Battery,

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which was now several hundreds of yards to the east of the infantry, at once came into action at 4,700 yards range, the 14th Battery was called back to assist it, and the 7th and 66th Batteries took up a covering position 1,200 yards behind the 14th. The enemy's fire, which was quite unexpected, caused a stampede among the mules of some machine-gun units which had just packed up, and these went off at a gallop followed by their drivers. The escort of the machine guns hurried after them, and in the confusion a battalion that was in the vicinity also began to retire, but was soon rallied.

The 35th Infantry Brigade then halted, the 7th Infantry Brigade moved on again, and the Turks, after advancing to within a mile of the British, broke off the fight at about 5.30 p.m., when firing ceased. Our artillery now drew off, followed at about 6 p.m. by the infantry, who brought in the wounded, for the casualties in this skirmish had amounted to 55 killed and wounded, of whom 2 were officers.

There was also some confusion and mingling of columns at the Pools of Siloam, as the day had been hot and the men and animals were very thirsty and tired on reaching them; but the units were quickly sorted out and the troops proceeded to their bivouacs or camps. These had been allotted under orders that were issued during the retirement, the 7th Infantry Brigade being directed to hold the Sannah position and Arab village to the north of it, the detachment, which had been maintained at the Twin canals for the purpose of securing the Pools of Siloam, coming under the orders of General Egerton. The 8th and 37th Infantry Brigades were sent to their former camps on the right bank, where the whole of the artillery of the striking force and the Cavalry Brigade would also be placed. The 28th Infantry Brigade was to join the 7th Division, and the 35th and 36th Infantry Brigades were also to cross to the left bank of the Tigris. These three brigades did not reach their posts until after midnight, after having covered about 50 miles of ground during the operations.

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The total casualties experienced in the attack and retirement amounted to 3,476, out of a total of about 24,000 fighting men that were available and in action or reserve on both banks of the Tigris. Of these 513 were killed, 43 being British and 15 Indian officers; 455 were missing, including 15 British and 6 Indian officers; and 2,508 were wounded, 65 being British and 41 Indian officers. On the other hand, since only about 12,000 men were closely engaged, certain brigades and units had suffered very heavily, and the losses of the 8th Infantry Brigade amounted to 1,074, of the 28th Infantry Brigade to 579, and of the 36th Infantry Brigade to 589.

The casualties that were experienced by the Turks are necessarily a matter of speculation. As regards the numbers that were engaged, it appears that the 2nd and 35th Divisions, about 9,500 strong, were in the positions or in reserve on the right bank, and that there were also 500 cavalry in this area. Three thousand men of the 52nd Division were passed over the river at or near Magasis, and there were perhaps 1,500 men on the Hai.

During this attempt to effect his relief General Townshend had held the troops of the garrison in readiness from 5.30 a.m. on the 8th, concentrating two brigades in positions from which they could undertake the passage of the Tigris. At about noon he received a message from General Aylmer in which it was stated that the Turks were making a stubborn resistance at the Dujailah redoubt, and were both passing troops from the left to the right bank at Magasis, and despatching reserves from Shumran towards the Hai, where the presence of 1,500 men was reported. The telegram ended with a request for information as to the steps that were being taken by General Townshend to co-operate in the attack.

A haze had come on at 9 a.m. which, with the mirage, soon made observation from Kut-al-Amarah towards Es Sinn impracticable. The Turkish bridge over the Hai was, however, still in view, and, as regards movements in

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this direction, Townshend replied that a careful watch had been kept on Shumran and that no reserves had been sent from these camps towards the Hai bridge with the exception of three squadrons of cavalry. On the other hand, 200 infantry had gone eastwards along the left bank. Troops from the garrison, he continued, would commence the crossing of the Tigris as soon as the enveloping movement began to develop to the south of the Dujailah redoubt. As this attack was not successful, no action was taken by the garrison of Kut-al-Amarah, except for some unsuccessful attempts to reach the enemy by means of shells fired from the 5-inch guns. The Turks, meanwhile, shelled the river side at Kut-al-Amarah, where the crossing would be made, causing a dozen casualties, and also manned the trenches opposite to the north-eastern and north-western sections of the defences.

At 5 p.m. General Aylmer informed General Townshend that the Dujailah redoubt had not been captured, but that a final attempt would then be made to storm it. No more was heard from the Tigris Corps until midnight, when a message came in to the effect that the Turks had lost heavily and it was doubtful, therefore, whether they would be able to maintain their positions. The telegram concluded with the words: "Will let you know to-morrow proposed plan, which will include English division which has just arrived." On the 9th information as to the actual situation was despatched to General Townshend, and he was informed that the message had been sent overnight with the object of misleading the enemy, since there was some ground for supposing that the Turks were in possession of the British cipher. This supposition was, however, subsequently discredited.

The British by no means relaxed their efforts to effect the relief of Kut-al-Amarah in consequence of their failure at the Dujailah redoubt. On the 23rd March, however, the

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long-expected snow flood came down the Tigris in earnest, and the Turks were henceforth able to add inundations to the other means they used for checking and delaying the British. In spite of the arrival of the greater portion of the 13th Division, Sir George Gorringe, who had replaced Sir Fenton Aylmer on the 12th March, was unable therefore to drive off the enemy. Kut-al-Amarah surrendered on the 29th April, and the attempts which had been made by the British to reach it had then involved some 23,500 casualties in battle, or a larger number of men than that with which Aylmer had first advanced in January 1916.

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APPENDIX I

PRINCIPAL EVENTS IN OTHER BRITISH THEATRES OF WAR, AND IN ASIA MINOR, SEPTEMBER 1914—APRIL 1916

1914

26th September. Commencement of operations against the Germans in the Kameruns, West Africa.

10th November. The announcement of the sinking of the German cruiser *Emden* in the Pacific, and of the imprisonment of the German cruiser *Königsberg* in a river in East Africa.

8th December. The Admiralty reported the destruction of the German squadron off the Falkland Islands.

17th December. The end of Turkish suzerainty over Egypt. A British protectorate proclaimed.

1915

3rd January. Defeat of the Turks by the Russians at Ardahan in Asia Minor.

13th January. Occupation by the Turks of the Persian town of Tabriz.

15th January. Russian success at Kara Urga in the Caucasus area. The Turks subsequently withdrew from Tabriz.

24th January. Naval action off the Dogger Bank.

2nd February. Repulse of a Turkish attack on the Suez Canal.

20th February. Allied squadrons bombarded the forts at the mouth of the Dardanelles. The bombardment was resumed on the 25th.

5th March. Renewed bombardment of the forts at the Dardanelles.

10th–13th March. Battle of Neuve Chapelle, in France.

18th March. Further attack by the allied squadrons on the forts at the Dardanelles.

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22nd April. Commencement of the second battle of Ypres, in Belgium.

25th April. The British and French land on the Gallipoli peninsula.

May to September. The Russians driven back in Poland and Galicia.

4th May. Defeat of the Turks by the Russians in the Caucasus area. The latter then took Van and Mush.

23rd May. Italy declared war on Austria.

9th June. Conquest of German South-west Africa completed.

6th August. British landed at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli peninsula. Subsequent deadlock.

25th September and following days. The battle of Loos in France.

October. Reports that the Turks were sending reinforcements to their armies in Asia Minor.

5th October. British and French landed at Salonika.

14th October. The British declared war on Bulgaria.

9th December. The Allies fell back on the town of Salonika. The conquest of Serbia by the Germans, Austrians, and Bulgarians had practically been completed.

16th December. The Russians entered Hamadan in Persia.

19th December. The evacuation of Suvla and Anzac, Gallipoli peninsula, completed.

1916

8th January. The evacuation of the southern portion of the Gallipoli peninsula carried out.

16th January. The Russians began an offensive in the Caucasus theatre of war.

16th February. The Russians captured the fortress of Erzeroum in Asia Minor.

Middle of February. The capture of the Kameruns was completed.

21st February. The commencement of the battle of Verdun, in France.

5th March. The invasion of German East Africa was undertaken.

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APPENDIX II

DISTRIBUTION OF FORCE IN MESOPOTAMIA TOWARDS THE END OF OCTOBER, 1915

Aziziyah :

Headquarters of the 6th Division.
16th Infantry Brigade.
2nd Dorsetshire Regiment.
20th Punjabis.
104th, Wellesley's, Rifles.
117th Royal Mahrattas.
(The 66th Punjabis were on the way to replace the 20th, Duke of Cambridge's Own, Infantry, Brownlow's Punjabis.)
17th Infantry Brigade.
1st Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry.
22nd Punjabis.
103rd Mahratta Light Infantry.
119th Infantry, the Multan Regiment.
18th Infantry Brigade.
2nd Norfolk Regiment.
7th, Duke of Connaught's Own, Rajputs.
110th Mahratta Light Infantry.
120th Rajputana Infantry.
10th Field Artillery Brigade.
63rd Field Battery.
76th Field Battery.
82nd Field Battery.
Ammunition Column.
1/5th Hampshire Howitzer Battery (Territorials).
86th Heavy Battery.
Two guns of 104th Heavy Battery.
Squadron 33rd Cavalry.
Machine-gun Battery.

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Aziziyah—*continued:*

Two armoured cars.
Two companies 48th Pioneers.
17th Company Sappers and Miners.
22nd Company Sappers and Miners.
Bridging Train.
Searchlight Section.
Signal units.
Section of Mechanical Transport, and other Supply and Transport units.
Field Ambulances.
6th Cavalry Brigade.
7th Hariana Lancers (three squadrons).
16th Cavalry (two squadrons).
33rd, Queen Victoria's Own, Light Cavalry (two squadrons).
" S " Battery Horse Artillery.
Signal unit.
Ambulance.
One flight of aeroplanes.

Kut-al-Amarah :

Advanced General Headquarters.
30th Infantry Brigade (less 1/4th Hampshire Regiment).
2/7th Gurkha Rifles.
24th Punjabis.
76th Punjabis.
Two 15-pounders, Indian Artillery Volunteers.
Two companies 48th Pioneers.
Signal units.
Administrative units.
Ambulance units.

Ali-al-Gharbi :

Two companies 67th Punjabis.
One 15-pounder Indian Artillery Volunteers.

Amarah :

Headquarters 12th Division.
1/4th Hampshire Regiment.
Two companies 67th Punjabis.
(20th Punjabis on their way down-river.)
Two guns 104th Heavy Battery.

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Amarah—*continued:*
12th Division—*continued.*
Eight 15-pounders Indian Artillery Volunteers.
Signal units.
Supply units.
Hospital units.

Kalah Salih :
A few men of the 67th Punjabis.

Kurnah :
Two companies 43rd Erinpura Regiment.

Karun area :
23rd Cavalry (one squadron soon moved to the Tigris front).
Two companies 43rd Erinpura Regiment.
Administrative units.

Nasiriyah :
12th Infantry Brigade (less 67th Punjabis).
2nd, Queen's Own, Royal West Kent Regiment.
44th Merwara Regiment.
90th Punjabis.
One squadron 33rd Cavalry.
30th Mountain Battery.
Four 15-pounders Indian Artillery Volunteers.
12th Company Sappers and Miners.
Signal units.
Supply units.
Ambulance and Hospital units.

Basrah :
General Headquarters.
Headquarters of the Inspector-General of Communications.
4th, Prince Albert Victor's, Rajputs.
Four guns 23rd Mountain Battery.
Supply units.
Hospital units.
Base depots.
Two guns of the 23rd Mountain Battery, and the Sirmur Sappers and Miners were on their way up-river.

Fao and Abadan :
A few men of the 4th Rajputs.

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Bushire :

One squadron 16th Cavalry.
11th Rajputs.
96th Berar Infantry.
Fifty officers and men 2/7th Gurkhas.
Five guns captured from the Turks.
Administrative units.

Shipping available

At this period there were available for all military services in Mesopotamia some 17 paddle-steamers, 3 small sternwheelers, 8 or 9 tugs, 10 or 11 launches, and 36 barges. A steamer and its barges (one barge was generally lashed on each side of the vessel) could carry from 500 to 800 infantry, or a battery, or about three troops. About 150 tons of supplies and stores could be sent up-river daily. From 10 to 14 days would be occupied by steamers in a voyage from Basrah to Aziziyah, at this time of year, and from 7 to 9 days in the voyage down-river. A number of mahailas (native barges) were also hired for the carriage of stores and supplies, and the time taken by these boats in sailing from Basrah to Aziziyah might be as much as two months.

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APPENDIX III

DISTRIBUTION OF FORCE IN MESOPOTAMIA ABOUT THE MIDDLE OF DECEMBER 1915

Kut-al-Amarah :

- Headquarters of the 6th Division.
- 16th Infantry Brigade.
  - 2nd Dorsetshire Regiment.
  - 66th Punjabis.
  - 104th, Wellesley's, Rifles.
  - 117th Royal Mahrattas.
- 17th Infantry Brigade.
  - 1st Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry.
  - 22nd Punjabis.
  - 103rd Mahratta Light Infantry.
  - 119th Infantry, the Multan Regiment.
- 18th Infantry Brigade.
  - 2nd Norfolk Regiment.
  - 7th, Duke of Connaught's Own, Rajputs.
  - 110th Mahratta Light Infantry.
  - 120th Rajputana Infantry.
- 30th Infantry Brigade.
  - Detachment 2nd, Queen's Own, Royal West Kent Regiment.
  - Detachment 1/4th Hampshire Regiment (Territorials).
  - 2/7th Gurkha Rifles.
  - 24th Punjabis.
  - 67th Punjabis (less detachments).
  - 76th Punjabis.
- One squadron 23rd Cavalry.
- One squadron 7th Lancers.
- One squadron 33rd Cavalry.
- 10th Field Artillery Brigade.
  - 63rd Field Battery.
  - 76th Field Battery.

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Kut-al-Amarah—*continued:*

10th Field Artillery Brigade—*continued.*

82nd Field Battery.

Ammunition Column.

1/5th Hampshire Howitzer Battery (Territorials).

86th Heavy Battery.

Two guns 104th Heavy Battery.

Two guns "S" Battery Horse Artillery.

Four 15-pounders, Indian Artillery Volunteers.

Machine-gun Battery.

48th Pioneers.

17th and 22nd Sappers and Miners.

Bridging Train.

Searchlight Section.

Signal units.

Supply and Transport units.

Field Ambulances and Hospital units.

Ali-al-Gharbi:

6th Cavalry Brigade.

14th King's Hussars.

7th Hariana Lancers (less detachment in Kut-al-Amarah).

16th Cavalry (less one squadron).

33rd, Queen Victoria's Own, Light Cavalry (less detachments in Kut-al-Amarah and at Nasiriyah).

"S" Battery Horse Artillery (four guns).

Signal, Administrative, and Ambulance units.

28th Infantry Brigade.

2nd Leicestershire Regiment.

51st Sikhs.

53rd Sikhs.

56th Punjabi Rifles.

One company 1/4th Hampshire Regiment (Territorials).

One company 20th Punjabis.

One company 67th Punjabis.

Two guns 23rd Mountain Battery.

1/1st Sussex Field Battery (Territorials).

One 15-pounder Indian Artillery Volunteers.

Signal, Administrative, and Medical units.

One flight of aeroplanes.

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Amarah :
- Headquarters of Tigris Corps, with improvised Staff.
- 35th Infantry Brigade, from India.
  - 1/5th the Buffs.
  - 37th Dogras.
  - Two companies of 97th Deccan Infantry.
- Two companies of 1/4th Hampshire Regiment (Territorials).
- 28th Punjabis.
- One company 4th Rajputs.
- One company 67th Punjabis.
- Two guns 23rd Mountain Battery.
- Two guns 104th Heavy Battery.
- Two guns Indian Artillery Volunteers.
- Signal, Administrative, and Medical units.

Line of Communication Amarah to Kurnah :
- Three companies 20th, Duke of Cambridge's Own, Infantry (Brownlow's Punjabis).
- One company 43rd Erinpura Regiment.
- 107th Pioneers.
- 12th Sappers and Miners.

Hakaikah :
- One company of 43rd Erinpura Regiment.

Nasiriyah :
- 12th Infantry Brigade (less two companies of Queen's Own, and 67th Punjabis).
  - Two companies 2nd, Queen's Own, Royal West Kent Regiment.
  - 44th Merwara Infantry.
  - 90th Punjabis.
- One squadron 33rd Cavalry.
- 30th Mountain Battery.
- 4 guns Indian Artillery Volunteers.
- Signal, Administrative, and Medical units.

Basrah :
- General Headquarters.
- Headquarters of Inspector-General of Communications.
- 34th Infantry Brigade from India.
  - Two companies of 97th Deccan Infantry.
  - 102nd, King Edward's Own, Grenadiers.
- Three companies 4th, Prince Albert Victor's, Rajputs.

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Basrah—*continued:*

4th Cavalry.
12th Cavalry.
1/2nd Sussex Field Battery (Territorials).
Two guns of 23rd Mountain Battery.
13th Sappers and Miners.
Supply units.
Hospital units.
Base depots.

Karun area:

23rd Cavalry (less one squadron).
Two companies of 43rd Erinpura Regiment.

Fao:

A few men of the 4th Rajputs.

Bushire:

As before.

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APPENDIX IV

DISTRIBUTION OF FORCE IN MESOPOTAMIA AT END OF JANUARY 1916

Kut-al-Amarah :

As in Appendix III.

Between Kut-al-Amarah and Ali-al-Gharbi :

Headquarters of Tigris Corps.

Headquarters of 3rd Division.

7th Infantry Brigade.

1st Connaught Rangers.

1/1st, King George's Own, Gurkha Rifles, the Malaun Regiment.

1/9th Gurkha Rifles.

89th Punjabis *en route* up-river.

8th Infantry Brigade.

1st Manchester Regiment (less two companies *en route*).

2nd, Queen Victoria's Own, Rajput Light Infantry.

47th Sikhs and 59th Scinde Rifles *en route* up-river.

9th Infantry Brigade.

1st Highland Light Infantry (less two companies *en route*).

3rd Brahmans and 27th Punjabis (*en route* up-river).

34th Sikh Pioneers.

Signal units.

Headquarters 7th Division.

19th Infantry Brigade.

1st Seaforth Highlanders (Ross-shire Buffs, the Duke of Albany's).

28th Punjabis.

92nd Punjabis.

125th, Napier's, Rifles.

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Between Kut-al-Amarah and Ali-al-Gharbi—*continued*:

21st Infantry Brigade.
- 2nd Black Watch (Royal Highlanders).
- 6th Jat Light Infantry.
- 9th Bhopal Infantry.
- 41st Dogras.

28th Infantry Brigade.
- 2nd Leicestershire Regiment.
- 51st Sikhs.
- 53rd Sikhs.
- 56th Punjabi Rifles.

107th Pioneers.

Signal units.

Corps troops.

35th Infantry Brigade.
- 1/5th Buffs (East Kent Regiment) (Territorials).
- 37th Dogras.
- 97th Deccan Infantry.
- 102nd, King Edward's Own, Grenadiers.

36th Infantry Brigade.
- 62nd Punjabis.
- 1/6th Devonshire Regiment (Territorials), 26th Punjabis, 82nd Punjabis, *en route* up-river.
- 1/4th Hampshire Regiment (Territorials) (less one company).
- 128th Pioneers.

6th Cavalry Brigade.
- 14th King's Hussars.
- 4th Cavalry.
- 7th Hariana Lancers (less detachment in Kut-al-Amarah).
- 16th Cavalry (less one squadron and two troops).
- 33rd, Queen Victoria's Own, Light Cavalry (less detachments at Kut-al-Amarah and at Nasiriyah).

"S" Battery Horse Artillery (four guns).

Signal and Administrative units.

9th Field Artillery Brigade.
- 19th, 20th, and 28th Field Batteries, and Ammunition Column.

61st Howitzer Battery.

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Between Kut-al-Amarah and Ali-al-Gharbi—*continued:*

23rd Mountain Battery (less one section).

1/1st Sussex Field Battery. 1/3rd Sussex Field Battery (Territorials) *en route.*

72nd and 77th Heavy Howitzer Batteries.

One section 104th Heavy Battery.

3rd and 13th Companies of Sappers and Miners, 20th and 21st *en route.*

Signal, Supply, and Ambulance units.

Two flights 30th Squadron Royal Flying Corps.

Ali-al-Gharbi :

Two companies 67th Punjabis.

One troop 16th Cavalry.

One 15-pounder Indian Artillery Volunteers.

Filai Filah :

One company 20th, Duke of Cambridge's Own, Infantry (Brownlow's Punjabis).

Amarah :

3rd Brahmans.

One company 4th, Prince Albert Victor's, Rajputs.

One troop 16th Cavalry.

Two 15-pounder guns Indian Artillery Volunteers.

Signal, Supply, and Medical units.

Depot 30th Squadron Royal Flying Corps.

Kalah Salih, Ezra's Tomb, and the various bridges:

Two companies 20th Punjabis.

Kurnah :

Two companies 43rd Erinpura Regiment.

Hakaikah and Suk-ash-Shuyukh :

31st Punjabis, 12th Sappers and Miners (less one section).

Nasiriyah and Butyaniyah :

12th Infantry Brigade.

1/5th Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey) (Territorials).

44th Merwara Infantry.

90th Punjabis.

34th Infantry Brigade.

Two companies Queen's Own, Royal West Kent Regiment.

112th Infantry.

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Nasiriyah and Butyaniyah—*continued*:
- 114th Mahrattas.
- 30th Mountain Battery.
- 1/2nd Sussex Field Battery (Territorials).
- Four 15-pounder guns Indian Artillery Volunteers.
- 12th Cavalry (less two squadrons).
- One squadron 33rd Cavalry.
- Signal, Supply, and Medical units.

Basrah:
- General Headquarters.
- Headquarters of Inspector-General of Communications.
  - Two squadrons 12th Cavalry.
  - 4th, Prince Albert Victor's, Rajputs (less one company).
  - One company 20th Punjabis.
  - One section 23rd Mountain Battery.
  - 4th Sappers and Miners.
  - Supply units.
  - Hospital units.
  - Base depots.
  - One flight 30th Squadron Royal Flying Corps.
  - One flight Royal Naval Air Service.
  - Under orders to move to Shaikh Saad:
    - 4th Field Artillery Brigade, of 7th, 14th, and 66th Field Batteries and Ammunition Column.
    - 13th Field Artillery Brigade of 2nd, 8th, and 44th Field Batteries and Ammunition Column.
    - 60th Field Howitzer Battery.
    - 15th Lancers (Cureton's Multanis).

Karun area:
- 23rd Cavalry (less one squadron).
- Two companies 43rd Erinpura Regiment.

Bushire:
- One squadron 16th Cavalry.
- 11th Rajputs.
- 96th Berar Infantry.
- Three 7-pounder guns.
- Two 15-pounder guns.
- Two Turkish mountain guns.

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APPENDIX V

DISTRIBUTION OF FORCE IN MESOPOTAMIA AT THE END OF FEBRUARY 1916

Kut-al-Amarah :

As in Appendix III.

Tigris Corps :

Headquarters of Tigris Corps.
Headquarters of 3rd Division.
7th Infantry Brigade.
1st Connaught Rangers and drafts of the Queen's Own.
27th Punjabis.
89th Punjabis.
128th Pioneers.
8th Infantry Brigade.
1st Manchester Regiment.
2nd, Queen Victoria's Own, Rajput Light Infantry.
47th Sikhs.
59th Scinde Rifles.
9th Infantry Brigade.
1st Highland Light Infantry.
1/1st, King George's Own, Gurkha Rifles, the Malaun Regiment.
1/9th Gurkha Rifles and drafts of 2/7th Gurkha Rifles.
93rd Burma Infantry.
4th Field Artillery Brigade.
7th, 14th, and 66th Field Batteries, and Ammunition Column.
One squadron 16th Cavalry.
34th Sikh Pioneers.
20th and 21st Sappers and Miners.
3rd Divisional Signal Company.
3rd Mobile Veterinary Section.
Supply units.

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Tigris Corps—*continued:*

Headquarters 7th Division.
19th Infantry Brigade.
2nd Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) and 1st Seaforth Highlanders (Composite Battalion).
28th Punjabis.
92nd Punjabis and drafts of the 66th and 67th Punjabis.
125th, Napier's, Rifles, and drafts of 104th, 110th, and 120th.
21st Infantry Brigade.
2nd Dorsetshire Regiment and 2nd Norfolk Regiment (Composite Battalion of drafts).
6th Jat Light Infantry.
9th Bhopal Infantry, and drafts of 7th and 8th Rajputs.
Composite Battalion of 103rd, 105th, 110th, and 117th.
28th Infantry Brigade.
2nd Leicestershire Regiment.
Provisional Battalion of drafts of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry.
51st Sikhs.
53rd Sikhs and drafts of 24th Punjabis.
56th Punjabi Rifles.
9th Field Artillery Brigade.
19th, 20th, and 28th Field Batteries, and Ammunition Column.
One squadron 16th Cavalry.
107th Pioneers.
3rd Sappers and Miners.
7th Divisional Signal Company.
7th Mobile Veterinary Section.
Supply units.

Corps troops.

35th Infantry Brigade.
1/5th Buffs (East Kent Regiment) (Territorials).
1/4th Hampshire Regiment (Territorials).
37th and 41st Dogra Composite Battalion.
97th Deccan Infantry.
36th Infantry Brigade.
1/6th Devonshire Regiment (Territorials).
26th Punjabis.

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Tigris Corps—*continued:*

36th Infantry Brigade—*continued.*

62nd Punjabis.

82nd Punjabis.

6th Cavalry Brigade.

14th King's Hussars.

4th Cavalry.

7th Hariana Lancers (less detachment at Kut-al-Amarah).

33rd, Queen Victoria's Own, Light Cavalry (less detachments at Kut-al-Amarah and Nasiriyah).

"S" Battery Horse Artillery (four guns).

Signal section and Administrative units.

13th Field Artillery Brigade.

2nd, 8th, and 44th Field Batteries and Ammunition Column.

60th and 61st Field Howitzer Batteries.

23rd Mountain Battery (less one section).

1/1st and 1/3rd Sussex Field Batteries (Territorials).

72nd and 77th Heavy Howitzer Batteries.

One section 104th Heavy Battery.

7th Divisional Ammunition Column.

12th Sappers and Miners (less one section).

13th Sappers and Miners.

Army Corps Signal Company.

12th Divisional Signal Company (less two sections).

33rd Divisional Signal Company (less two sections).

One Waggon and two Pack Wireless stations.

Supply units.

Field Ambulances.

Veterinary units.

Remount unit.

Shaikh Saad:

Two flights 30th Squadron Royal Flying Corps.

One flight Royal Naval Air Service.

Two companies 3rd Brahmans.

102nd, King Edward's Own, Grenadiers.

One 15-pounder gun Indian Artillery Volunteers.

Supply units.

Hospital units.

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Ali-al-Gharbi :

One troop 16th Cavalry.
Two companies 67th Punjabis.
One 15-pounder Indian Artillery Volunteers.
One Pack Wireless station.

Filai Filah :

One company 20th, Duke of Cambridge's Own, Infantry (Brownlow's Punjabis).

Amarah :

One troop 16th Cavalry.
Two companies 3rd Brahmans.
One company 4th, Prince Albert Victor's, Rajputs.
One company 20th Punjabis.
Two 15-pounder guns Indian Artillery Volunteers.
Various depots, Signal and Medical units.

Kalah Salih and various bridges :

One company 29th Punjabis.

Kurnah :

Two companies 43rd Erinpura Regiment.
112th Infantry.
4th Sappers and Miners.
Hospital units.

Hakaikah and Suk-ash-Shuyukh :

31st Punjabis.
One section 12th Sappers and Miners.

Nasiriyah :

12th Infantry Brigade.
1/5th Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey) (Territorials).
44th Merwara Infantry.
90th Punjabis.
34th Infantry Brigade.
Two companies Queen's Own, Royal West Kent Regiment.
114th Mahrattas.
30th Mountain Battery.
1/2nd Sussex Field Battery (Territorials).
Four 15-pounder guns Indian Artillery Volunteers.
12th Cavalry (less two squadrons).
One squadron 33rd Cavalry.
Signal, Supply, and Medical units.

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Basrah :

- General Headquarters.
- Headquarters Inspector-General of Communications.
- Headquarters of Base.
- 37th Infantry Brigade.
  - 1/4th Somerset Light Infantry (Prince Albert's) (Territorials).
  - 1/2nd, King Edward's Own, Gurkha Rifles (the Sirmoor Rifles).
  - 36th Sikhs.
- Two squadrons 12th Cavalry.
- 15th Lancers (Cureton's Multanis).
- Three companies 4th, Prince Albert Victor's, Rajputs.
- One company 20th Punjabis.
- One section 23rd Mountain Battery.
- Two flights 30th Squadron Royal Flying Corps.
- One flight Royal Naval Air Service.
- 37th Brigade Signal Section.
- Signal park.
- Supply units.
- Hospital units.
- Base depots.

Fao :

- 14 men 20th Punjabis.

Karun area :

- 23rd Cavalry (less one squadron).
- Two companies 43rd Erinpura Regiment.

Bushire :

- One squadron 16th Cavalry.
- 11th Rajputs.
- 96th Berar Infantry.
- Two Naval 12-pounder guns.
- Three 7-pounder guns.
- Two Turkish mountain guns.
- Two 15-pounder guns.

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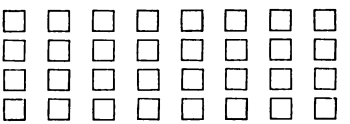
APPENDIX VI

MEMORANDUM THAT WAS ISSUED ON THE 3RD MARCH, 1916, AS A GENERAL GUIDE IN REGARD TO THE FORMATIONS THAT WERE TO BE ADOPTED DURING THE ADVANCE BY NIGHT AGAINST THE TURKISH POSITIONS.

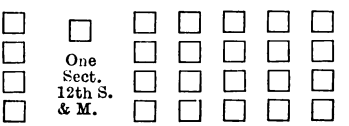
COLUMNS A AND B

Battalion in line of half-company columns in fours.

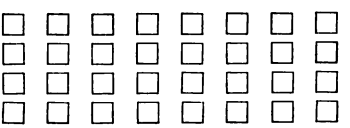


36th Infantry Brigade, with one section of the 12th Sappers and Miners.

Three battalions in line of half-battalion columns of fours; with the 12th Sappers and Miners.

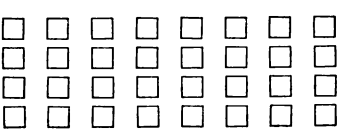


Four battalions in half-battalion columns in fours, with parties of Pioneers distributed in the rear of each column, so as to improve the parallel tracks for the guns following in rear should this be necessary.



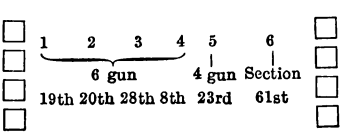
37th Infantry Brigade.

Four battalions in line of half-battalion columns in fours.



9th Infantry Brigade.

One battalion in column of route on each flank. Between battalions five batteries and one section each in column of route.



28th Infantry Brigade, 9th Field Artillery Brigade, 8th Field Battery and Ammunition Column, 23rd Mountain Battery (less

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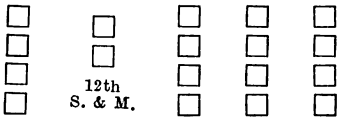
COLUMNS A AND B—*continued*

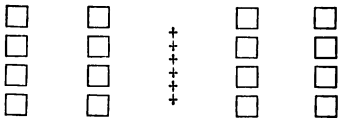
Two battalions in line of half-battalion columns in fours; and the 12th Sappers and Miners (less two sections) as shown.



one section), one section 61st Howitzer Battery, 12th Sappers and Miners (less two sections).

CAVALRY BRIGADE

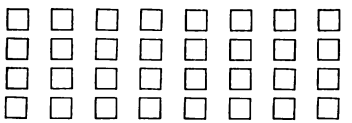
Regiments in line of regimental column of troops, with "S" Battery in column of route in centre.



Cavalry Brigade.

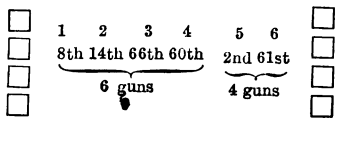
COLUMN C

Four battalions in line of half-battalion columns of fours.



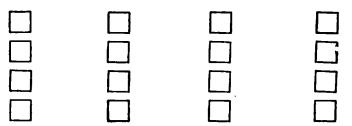
7th Infantry Brigade.

One battalion in column of route on each flank. Between these, six batteries (less two sections) each in column of route.



8th Infantry Brigade, 4th Field Artillery Brigade, 13th Field Artillery Brigade (less two batteries and one section), 61st Howitzer Battery (less one section).

Two battalions in line of half-battalion columns of fours.



NOTE 1.—Intervals and distances will be such as to maintain touch laterally and from front to rear, without expending men in connecting files.

NOTE 2.—First-line transport and field ambulances have not been shown above. These will either be fitted in between columns or march in rear of brigades on as broad a front as possible.

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INDEX

A

Abu Dhakar, 114, 143
Abu Rumman, 134, 185, 186, 188, 191, 196, 214
Administrative units, 41, 48, 51, 52, 62, 79, 116, 132, 148, 202, 203, 204, 221, 243, 245, 250, Appendices II–VI
Admiralty, 27
Afghanistan, 7, 98
Afghans, 17
Africa, East, 12, Appendix I
Africa, West, 12, Appendix I
Ahwaz, 5, 9, 39, 154
Air Force, 39, 46, 52, 60, 70, 76, 82, 83, 87, 88, 115, 116, 117, 121, 123, 128, 132, 133, 142, 148, 157, 189, 195, 200, 222, 226, 232, 234, 246, 247, 249, 250, 251, Appendices II–V
Air Force (Turkish), 128, 187, 207, 232, 249
Ajaimi, 112, 113
Aleppo, 3, 31, 32, 33, 83, 127, 180
Alexandretta, 25
Ali-al-Gharbi, 99, 101, 102, 103, 106, 107, 108, 114, 116, 119, 120, 121, 124, Appendices II–V
Ali Nejip Bey, 127
Amarah, capture of, 2, 6, 22, 140; garrison at, 9, 15, 29, 166, 167, Appendices II–V; position at, 99, 102, 113, 153, 154, 155, 159, 162, 173
Ambulances, 41, 48, 51, 52, 62, 79, 116, 132, 148, 202, 203, 204, 221, 243, 245, 250, Appendices II–V
Ammunition, 70, 72, 81, 104, 107, 148, 151, 152, 182, 204, 206, 207, 245, 249
Ammunition column, 51, 245, Appendices II–V
Anatolia, 9, 33
Angora, 25
Anizah Arabs, 30
Anzac, Appendix I
Arab village, 252
Arabia, 45
Arabs, 3, 6, 8, 12, 15, 30, 41, 47, 48, 49, 62, 69, 73, 77, 83, 84, 85, 87, 90, 97, 104, 121, 124, 134, 138, 149, 150, 184, 198, 200, 217, 222, 223, 229, 233, 236, 240
Ardahan, Appendix I
Armenia, 147
Armoured cars, 48, Appendix II
Army Commander. See Nixon, Lake
Artillery (British), 39, 205, 206, 207, 208, 212, 214, 215, 221, 223, 227, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 240, 243, 245, 246, 252. See also Batteries and Brigades Artillery, Volunteers
Artillery (Turkish), 49, 55, 64, 66, 68, 69, 74, 82, 218, 232, 233, 237, 238, 240, 244, 246, 249, 250, 251, 254
Asia Minor, 3, 11, 35, 179, 180
Asphyxiating gas, 213.
Atabah, 247
Attab, 205
Attaché, British, with Russians, 30, 31, 35
Australian troops, 139
Austria, Appendix I
Aylmer, Lieut.-Gen. Sir F. J., 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 123, 124, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 135, 136, 137, 140, 141, 142, 143, 145, 146, 148, 150, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 163, 164, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 188, 189, 190, 191, 193, 194, 204, 205, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211,

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212, 217, 219, 220, 221, 225, 226, 229, 231, 232, 234, 235, 236, 240, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 253, 254, 255
Aziziyah, 2, 14, 15, 18, 36, 38, 39, 42, 46, 91, 200, Appendix II

B

Badran, 30, 35, 131, 156, 200
Baghdad, advance on, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 32, 33, 34, 39, 52, 53, 60, 93, 128, 153; troops at or near, 30, 32, 34, 35, 127, 146, 147, 152, 153, 164, 175, 200
Baghdadiyah, 41, 47
Bait Issah, 189, 190, 199, 200
Bakhtiari, 150, 153
Balkans, 17
Banni, 144
Baratoff, General, 109, 118
Barrett, Lieut.-Gen. Sir A. A., commander of Force D, 1
Barrow, General Sir E., 16, 26
Basrah, base at, 15, 29, 38, 93, 98, 100, 110, 112, 129, 149, 150, 155, 159, 167, 173, 190; occupation of, 1, 7, 23; vilayat of, 9, 12, 90, 140
Bassouia, 182, 200, 211, 246
Batteries (see also Appendices II–VI):
"S" Horse Artillery, 14, 39, 41, 62, 63, 73, 77, 78, 116, 203, 234, 240
2nd Field, 202, 204, 214, 222, 245, 251
7th Field, 186, 203, 222, 252
8th Field, 202, 207, 223, 224, 227, 229, 239, 245
14th Field, 186, 203, 222, 252
19th Field, 203, 224
20th Field, 187, 203, 224, 226, 227, 229, 239
23rd Mountain, 116, 132, 186, 204, 214, 222, 232
28th Field, 186, 202, 223, 224, 251
44th Field, 201
60th Howitzer, 186, 201, 204, 222
61st Howitzer, 116, 128, 132, 187, 201, 203, 204, 222, 237, 249
63rd Field, 39, 41, 48, 51, 80
66th Field, 186, 203, 222, 252
72nd Heavy Howitzer, 116, 187, 201
76th Field, 39, 50, 61, 62, 80, 83
77th Heavy Howitzer, 116, 187, 201
82nd Field, 39, 48, 77, 78, 79, 80
86th Heavy, 39, 50, 51, 60, 72, 79, 148
104th Heavy, 39, 46, 116, 148, 187, 201
1/5th Hampshire Howitzer, 39, 52, 68, 72, 80
1/1st Sussex Field, 116, 187, 201
1/3rd Sussex Field, 113, 187, 201
Bir-as-Sabah, 147
Bitlis, 30, 32, 33, 35
Bombay, 100
Bridge, flying and ferry, 143, 144, 159, 160, 199, 232, 246, 247
Bridge of boats, 39, 47, 76, 99, 102, 108, 115, 117, 118, 126, 134, 142, 143, 156, 159, 171, 172, 174, 175, 182, 187, 201, 226, 234, 246, 253, 254
Bridging material, 214
Bridging Train, 46, 49, 116, 145
Brigade, 6th Cavalry, 7, 14, 41, 48, 51, 59, 62, 69, 73, 77, 80, 83, 87, 90, 91, 101, 102, 103, 107, 116, 117, 119, 124, 134, 135, 142, 157, 158, 186, 187, 188, 197, 201, 203, 204, 205, 211, 214, 220, 224, 234, 240, 241, 242, 245, 248, 251, 252, Appendices II–VI
Brigade, Turkish Cavalry, 41, 49, 62, 73, 77, 78, 80, 83, 84, 87, 89, 120, 134, 139, 146, 157, 181, 199, 251
Brigades, Field Artillery (Appendicies II–VI):
4th, 140, 186, 201, 203, 222, 245
9th, 116, 201, 203
13th, 159, 163, 167, 171, 173, 191, 201
Brigades, Infantry (Appendices II–VI):
7th, 142, 186, 203, 214, 221, 232, 233, 234, 235, 240, 245, 250, 251, 252
8th, 143, 186, 203, 214, 221, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 252, 253
9th, 116, 143, 186, 202, 214, 216, 218, 224, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 235, 241, 243, 250, 251
16th, 14, 48, 52, 65, 80, 83
17th, 46, 47, 48, 49, 66, 68, 79, 87
18th, 7, 40, 41, 48, 51, 73, 83, 87

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Brigades, Infantry—*continued.*
19th, 116, 143, 186, 201, 212
21st, 116, 143, 187, 201, 212
28th, 101, 102, 103, 116, 124, 132, 143, 186, 201, 203, 214, 218, 224, 228, 229, 230, 231, 235, 236, 241, 242, 243, 250, 251, 253
30th, 8, 38, 48, 52, 65, 87, 192
34th, 100, 113, 148
35th, 100, 116, 124, 143, 148, 187, 197, 198, 201, 202, 206, 214, 232, 233, 235, 240, 245, 250, 251, 252
36th, 105, 106, 148, 186, 201, 202, 205, 214, 216, 223, 224, 226, 227, 229, 230, 231, 234, 235, 236, 241, 242, 243, 245, 249, 252, 253
37th, 191, 201, 203, 205, 206, 214, 217, 221, 223, 225, 226, 228, 229, 233, 235, 237, 245, 252
38th, 191
British force. See Force D
British policy, 7, 11, 16, 17, 85. See also Policy, military
British prestige, 6, 86
Buenos Ayres, 7
Buffs, 1/5th, 202, Appendices III–V
Bulgaria, 17, 29, Appendix I
Burmah Infantry, 93rd, 227, 228, 241, Appendix V
Bustan, 50, 54, 59, 76
Butyaniyah, 148

C

Cabinet, 11, 16, 17, 18, 152, 162
Cairo, 31, 33
Campbell, Lieut.-Col. L. W. Y., 203, 230, 243
Casualties, 39, 41, 74, 75, 82, 84, 86, 92, 107, 115, 127, 132, 136, 228, 229, 231, 234, 236, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 247, 249, 250, 252, 253, 254, 255
Caucasus, 3, 5, 6, 25, 33, 128, 180, Appendix I
Cavalry (see also Hussars, Lancers):
4th, 116, 203, 245, Appendices III–V
12th, 113, Appendices IV, V
16th, 38, 62, 73, 116, 186, 201, Appendices II–V
23rd, 50, Appendices II–V
33rd, 62, 73, 81, 116, 132, 203, Appendices II–V
Cavalry Brigade. See Brigade, Cavalry
Central Powers, 17
Chahailah, 199, 200, 246, 251
Chamberlain, Mr. Austen, 8. See also Secretary of State, India Office
Chief of General Staff, India, 25, 34
Chief of Imperial General Staff, 25. See also Robertson
Christian, Brig.-Gen. G., 197, 202, 227, 229, 241, 243, 245
Clery's post, 132
Climo, Colonel S. H., 52, 64, 66, 68, 69, 220
Columns:
A, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 208, 210, 215, 216, 217, 218, 221, 223, 234, 240
B, 202, 203, 204, 205, 207, 208, 210, 215, 216, 218, 220, 221, 223, 234, 240
C, 203, 204, 205, 206, 210, 215, 218, 221, 225, 232, 240
Command, executive, 42, 85, 88, 150, 178
Commander-in-Chief:
India. See Duff
Mesopotamia. See Barrett, Nixon, Lake
Turkish. See Nur-ud-Din, Khalil
Communiqués, 88, 151
Concentration of force, 9, 105, 111, 165, 166, 176
Connaught Rangers, 1st, 221, Appendices IV–V
Constantinople, 5, 24, 31, 133, 147
Corps commander. See Aylmer, Gorringe
Corps, headquarters. See Headquarters, Tigris Corps
Corps, Tigris. See Tigris Corps
Corps, Turkish:
1st, 147
2nd, 146
13th, 75, 80, 91, 92, 127, 146, 199
18th, 75, 91, 92, 127, 146, 199
Ctesiphon, position at, 2, 8, 9, 43, 53, 116; troops at, 8, 10, 11, 14, 30, 34, 41, 47, 55, 200; arch at, 61, 77; battle of, 85, 86, 149, etc., 220; advance to, 151, 152

D

Dair, 32, 33
Damascus, 3, 33

Digitized by Google

Dardanelles, 9, 12, 17, 147, Appendix I. See also Gallipoli
Delamain, Major-Gen. W. S., 52, 59, 63, 65, 66, 74, 79, 80, 83, 87, 192
Devonshire Regt., 1/6th, 202, 226, 229, 231, 241, Appendices IV–V
Divisions, British (see also Indian Divisions, and Appendices II–V)
3rd, 21, 105, 107, 186, 188, 198, 201, 215, 230
6th, 2, 7, 8, 14, 15, 36, 39, 82
7th, 21, 102, 105, 107, 116, 117, 119, 213, 243, 252
12th, 113
13th, 157, 159, 160, 163, 165, 167, 168, 171, 172, 177, 191, 244, 254
New Indian, 148, 159, 163, 171, 172, 177
Divisions, Turkish:
2nd, 146, 158, 167, 181, 199, 253
3rd, 147
4th, 146
17th, 105, 106
23rd, 146
26th, 105, 109, 127, 146
35th, 2, 41, 49, 55, 70, 71, 75, 76, 78, 80, 81, 83, 84, 105, 106, 120, 127, 134, 146, 167, 181, 199, 253
36th, 105, 106, 117, 122, 127
38th, 2, 49, 55, 65, 68, 69, 72, 75, 76, 78, 80, 81, 84, 105, 106, 120, 122, 134, 146
41st, 199
45th, 49, 55, 61, 63, 66, 68, 69, 70, 71, 73, 75, 76, 78, 80, 81, 82, 84, 91, 105, 106, 127, 146, 167, 181, 200
51st, 30, 31, 33, 49, 55, 63, 69, 70, 71, 73, 75, 76, 78, 80, 81, 82, 84, 92, 105, 106, 120, 122, 127, 146, 167, 181, 199
52nd, 84, 105, 106, 109, 114, 117, 120, 122, 127, 134, 146, 167, 181, 194, 199, 253
Diyalah, 43, 44, 53, 54, 55, 70, 76, 82, 83, 84, 87
Dogger Bank, Appendix I
Dogras:
37th, 202, 233, Appendices IV–V
41st, 202, 233, Appendices IV–V
Dorsetshire Regt., 2nd, 64, 65, 66, 68, 69, 72, Appendices II, III, V
Duff, General Sir B., 5, 14, 17, 18, 19, 22, 27, 152, 153, 154, 160, 162, 163, 164, 165, 173, 179, 193
Dujailah canal, 144, 188, 195, 204, 206, 217, 220, 222, 223, 224, 228, 229, 231, 237, 238, 239, 240, 242, 246
Dujailah redoubt, 188, 191, 195, 196, 199, 200, 201, 205, 206, 207, 208, 211, 217, 218, 220, 221, 222, 223, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 250, 253, 254
Dunsford, Lieut.-Col. F. P. S., 203, 236

E

East, 26
East, Middle, 24
East, Near, 17, 24
Egerton, Major-Gen. R. C., 203, 233, 237, 252
Egypt, 5, 12, 29, 30, 31, 32, 88, 100, 121, 157, 165, 173, 180, 190, Appendix I
Elsmie, Lieut.-Col. A. M. S., 203, 230
Emden, Appendix I
Erzeroum, 33, 147, 180, Appendix I
Es Sinn, 23, 114, 115, 116, 120, 134, 144, 151, 157, 158, 166, 167, 169, 170, 174, 175, 176, 177, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 188, 189, 191, 194, 198, 199, 200, 201, 207, 218, 244, 247, 253
Europe, 146, 149, 180

F

Falahiyah, 214
Falkland Islands, Appendix I
Falujah, 4, 16, 106, 107
Ferry. See Bridge, flying
Field Service Regulations I, 1909, 138, 209
Filai Filah, 155, 162, Appendices IV–V
Floods, 20, 96, 97, 102, 129, 139, 140, 148, 149, 153, 154, 155, 161, 166, 169, 172, 173, 177, 179, 180, 195, 255
Force D (Force in Mesopotamia), 1, 16, 17, 28, 29, 31, 112, 130, 147, 148, 190, Appendices II–V
Foreign Office, 16, 27
Fowler, Brig.-Gen. F. J., 203, 211, 221, 222, 237, 239
France, 5, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 28, 38, 88, 100, 110, 121, Appendix I
Fry, Major-Gen. C. I., 40

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G

Gallipoli, 3, 5, 6, 12, 157, Appendix I. See also Dardanelles
General Headquarters, 9, 10, 41, 102, 108, 114, 115, 121, 124, 125, 133, 156, 157, 174, 188, 190, 191
General Staff:
See Chief of Imperial, and Robertson
Force D, 9, 72, 88, 93, 145, 181. See also General Headquarters
in India, 4, 5, 11
in India, Chief of, 25, 34
in London, 16, 21, 26
Major-General, 9, 151, 221
German action, 17, 105, Appendix I
German East Africa, Appendix I
German South-West Africa, Appendix I
Germans, 24, 50, Appendix I
Gordon, Brig.-Gen. L. A. C., 205
Gorringe, Major-Gen. Sir G. F., clears Arabistan, 2; captures Nasiriyah, 2, 15; at Nasiriyah, 113, 124; chief staff officer, Tigris Corps, 151, 155, 180, 186, 188, 221; commander Tigris Corps, 255
Government in England, 26, 27, 121, 139
Government of India, 18. See also Viceroy
Grenadiers, 102nd, 202, Appendices III–V
Gunboats. See Naval flotilla
Gurkhas:
1/1st, 203, 216, 227, 228, 231, 241, Appendices IV–V
1/2nd, 173, 191, 203, 222, 233, 237, 238, 239, Appendix V
1/9th, 203, 227, 228, 241, Appendices IV–V
2/7th, 38, 52, 63, 64, 66, 68, 72, 77, 78, 80, 81, 157, 203, Appendices II, III, V

H

Hai. See Shatt-al-Hai
Hamadan, 32, 109, 118, Appendix I
Hamiyadiyah, 205
Hamilton, Brig.-Gen. W. G., 40, 41, 51, 60, 61, 68, 69, 73, 74, 79
Hampshire Howitzer Battery, 1/5th. See Batteries
Hampshire Regt., 1/4th, 202, Appendices II–V
Hannah, 33, 95, 111, 129, 130, 132, 134, 135, 136, 140, 142, 143, 144, 156, 158, 160, 166, 169, 170, 174, 175, 176, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 193, 194, 196, 197, 199, 201, 208, 211, 212, 213, 243, 244, 247, 248
Hardinge of Penshurst, Lord. See Viceroy
Headquarters, Tigris Corps, 207, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 229, 231, 232, 234, 240, 242, 245, 250, 251
Hibsh, 123
High Wall, 65, 66, 67, 68, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 85, 87, 89
Highland Light Infantry, 1st, 203, 227, 228, 231, 241, Appendices IV–V
Hillah, 30, 200
Hoghton, Brig.-Gen. F. A., 50, 51, 59, 60, 61, 62, 65, 66, 70, 72, 74, 79, 80, 81, 83, 192
Homs, 31, 33
Horseshoe Lake, 199, 247
Hospital clearing ships, 39, 132
Hospital units, Appendices II–V
Hussars, 14th, 98, 116, 203, Appendices III–V

I

Imam Ali Mansur, 195, 223, 226, 234, 240, 245, 246
India, 27, 105, 139, 145, 159, 162, 163, 171, 172, 173, 190
India, authorities in, 11, 33, 100, 103, 145. See also Government, Viceroy
India Office, 8, 16, 18, 27. See also Military Secretary
Indian divisions, sent to France, 11, 14, 21, 28; from France, 10, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 38, 110
Infantry (see also Appendices II–V):
93rd (Burmah), 227, 228, 241
97th (Deccan), 202
103rd (Mahratta Light), 50
110th (Mahratta Light), 62, 69, 79, 80
112th, 113
119th (Multan), 60, 65, 67
120th (Rajputana), 62, 73, 79, 80
Infantry brigades. See Brigades
Irak, 3, 29, 33, 84, 196

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J

Jasan, 200
Jazirah, 4
Juwaimsah, 47, 200

K

Kafl, 8
Kameruns, Appendix I
Kara Urga, Appendix I
Karmanshah, 107, 109, 118, 128, 147, 167, 180
Karun, R., 2, 4, 8, 12, 29, 112, 199, Appendices II–V
Kasr-i-Shirin, 139
Kazvin, 128
Keary, Major-Gen. H. D'U., 186, 197, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 211, 221, 222, 236, 239, 240, 245, 248, 251
Kemball, Major-Gen. G. V., 9, 38, 73, 85, 132, 197, 202, 204, 205, 206, 207, 209, 210, 211, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 223, 224, 226, 227, 229, 231, 234, 235, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 245, 246, 249, 250
Khalil Pasha, 31, 32, 33, 35, 79, 127, 133
Khamisiyah, 112
Khanikin, 3, 4, 32, 127, 139, 152, 199
King's Own Royal Regt., 6th, 244
Kirkuk, 146
Konia, 31
Königsberg, Appendix I
Kumait, 155
Kurnah, occupied by British, 2, 23, 41, 85, 86, 155; troops at, 125, Appendices II–V; position at, 153, 154, 173
Kusaibah, 30, 50, 51, 55, 62, 63, 70, 87
Kut-al-Amarah, captured by British, 2; battle of, 7, 13, 14, 15, 41, 44, 55, 56, 71, 85, 200; concentration at, 7, 8; position at, 7, 9, 12, 14, 17, 18, 22, 23, 35, 90, 94, 95, 130, 154; strategic importance of, 7, 93, etc., 102, 103, 151, 153, 154, 155; troops at, 29, Appendix II; advanced base at, 39; siege of, 93, 100, 103, 105, 111, 113, 114, 116, 117, 120, 125, 130, 131, 139, 145, 148, 157, 158, 162, 173, 176, 181, 188, 192, 198, 199, 200; fort at, 94, 113, 114, 141; garrison of, 103, 106, 107, 108, 117, 118, 119, 124, 128, 130, 132, 147, 148, 156, 157, 164, 179, 191, 192; food in, 104, 111, 129, 135, 136, 137, 138, 140, 151, 152, 165, 173, 179, 194; ammunition in, 104, 105, 107, 148, 151; questions as to relief of, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 121, 122, 125, 129, 132, 135, 136, 137, 139, 150, 153, 157, 161, 162, 163, 166, 167, 168, 169, 171; efforts to relieve, 126, 132, 136, 213, etc.; question of surrender of, 136, 152; plans for relief of, 139, 140, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 169, 170, 171, 173, 174, 175, 178, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 193, 194, 196, 197, 198, 201, 202, 219, 254; sickness in, 179; surrender of, 255
Kutniyah, 29, 40, 41, 46, 90

L

Ladysmith, 99
Lajj, 49, 52, 59, 74, 76, 79, 81, 84, 85, 87, 88, 89, 90
Lake, Lieut.-Gen. Sir P. H. N., 25, 34, 136, 137, 138, 140, 145, 146, 148, 150, 152, 155, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 166, 167, 168, 172, 173, 174, 177, 178, 188, 189, 193, 244
Lancers, 7th, 38, 41, 62, 75, 116, 202, 203, Appendices II–V
Leachman, Major J. E., 223
Lebanon, 31
Leicestershire Regt., 2nd, 203, 227, 230, 231, 241, Appendices III–V
Line of Communications, 16, 19, 74, 90, 94, 111, 148, 158, 127
Liquorice factory and village, 94, 104, 174, 188
London, authorities in, 103, 111. See also Cabinet

M

Machine Gun Battery, 48, 63, 77, Appendices II–III
MacMahon, Marshal, 37
Madug, 234

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Magasis, 174, 188, 199, 207, 211, 232, 244, 246, 247, 253
Maharijah, 142, 143, 144
Mahmud Muktar Pasha, 31
Mahrattas:
103rd (Mahratta Light Infantry), 50, Appendices II, III, V
110th (Mahratta Light Infantry), 62, 69, 79, 80, Appendices II, III, V
114th, 113, Appendices IV, V
117th, 63, 64, 66, 72, 87, Appendices II, III, V
Main operations, 12, 13, 28
Manchester Regt., 1st, 222, 236, 237, 238, Appendices IV, V
Manœuvre, facilities for, 15, 44, 180
Marseilles, 101
Medical establishment, 86, 132. See also Ambulances
Melliss, Major-Gen. Sir C., 51, 87, 90, 91, 92
Mesopotamia, 1, 5, 6, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 19, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 45, 121, 130, 139, 145, 147, 148, 152, 157, 159, 161, 162, 167, 179, 180, 198, 219
Mesopotamia Commission, report of, 5, 8, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 26, 27
Messages. See Signal Service
Military Secretary, India Office. See Barrow
Mines, 46, 87
Minthar Saiyid Hashim, 198
Mirage, 43, 46, 47, 144, 196, 229, 233, 250, 251, 253
Money, Major-Gen. A. W., 145
Moore, General Sir John, 37
Moral, 10, 57, 78, 85, 107, 113, 119, 122, 123, 128, 131, 170, 175
Mosul, 8, 30, 32, 78, 84, 146
Muhammad Abdul Hassan, 144
Mush, Appendix I

N

Nakhailat, 234, 248
Napoleon, 37, 71, 220
Nasiriyah, capture of, 2, 7, 23; security of, 5, 9, 39, 86, 99, 103, 143, 155; position of, 12, 154; troops at, 29, 90, 112, 113, 124, 130, 147, Appendices II–V
Naval actions, Appendix I
Naval flotilla, 2, 22, 23, 39, 41, 51, 61, 66, 69, 74, 87, 89, 90, 91, 92, 101, 139, 140, 187, 190, 196, 201, 243
Naval Officer, Senior, 74
Navigation of rivers, 2, 14, 91
Neuve Chapelle, Appendix I
Nicholas, Grand Duke, 179
Night, advances by, 59, 91, 134, 204, 215; attacks by, 81, 114; operations by memorandum on, 196, Appendix VI
Nixon, Lieut.-Gen. Sir J., assumes command, 1; takes offensive, 2; instructions to, 2; memorandum by, 3; question of advance on Baghdad, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26, 30, 32, 34, 35, 36, 44; forces under, 39, 107, 108, 122, 128, 133, Appendices II–III; at front, 42, 60; system, 45, 85; action at Ctesiphon, 69, 75, 78, 85; actions after Ctesiphon, 88, 90, 93, 100, 101, 103, 105, 106, 109, 111, 112, 113, 118, 119, 121, 123, 124, 127, 128, 132, 133, 135; health of, 136
Norfolk Regt., 2nd, 62, 73, 79, 80, 192, Appendices II, III, V
Norie, Brig.-Gen. C. E. de M., 187, 190
Nur-ud-Din Pasha, 14, 18, 55, 56, 75, 78, 80, 83, 84, 88, 89, 91, 114, 125, 127, 133

O

Oilfields, 12, 112, 113, 153, 154
Orah, 184, 214
Orders for operations, 49, etc., 64, 67, 88, 126, 185, etc., 196, etc., 201, etc., 211, 212, 219, 230, 231, 233, 234, 235, 236, 240, 241, 242, 245
Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, 1st, 60, 67, 192, 203, 216, 224, Appendices II, III, V

P

Palestine, 147
Persia, 17, 26, 32, 97, 98, 107, 127, 147, 153, 162, 180, Appendix I
Persian Gulf, 147
Piffer Nullah, 212, 213

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Pioneers:
34th, 186, 202, 203, 205, 222, 243, Appendices IV–V
48th, 38, 50, 62, 192, Appendices II–III
107th, 116, 186, 201, 244, Appendices III–V
128th, 203, 221, 233, Appendices IV–V
Policy, military, 7, 11, 13, 17, 22, 100, 108, 111, 121, 129, 130, 136, 150, 152, 153, 157, 161, 162, 178, 180, 189
Prague, 99
Prestige, 5, 6, 86
Prime Minister, 26, 27
Prisoners, 64, 68, 75, 89
Punjabis (see also Appendices II–V):
20th, 63
22nd, 60, 61, 192
24th, 46, 52, 63, 64, 66, 69, 77, 80, 203
26th, 202, 216, 226, 227, 229, 239
27th, 203, 221, 233, 237
31st, 113
62nd, 202, 216, 224, 226, 231
66th, 63, 64, 66, 69
76th, 38, 51, 63, 74, 80, 83
82nd, 202, 216, 226, 227, 229, 236
89th, 203, 221, 233
92nd, 201, 214
Pusht-i-Kuh, 150, 153, 154

Q

Queen's Own, Royal West Kent Regt., 2nd, 90, 203, Appendices II–V
Queen's Royal Regt., 1/5th, 113, Appendices IV–V

R

Railways, 22, 97
Rajputs:
2nd (Rajput Light Infantry), 132, 203, 222, 236, 237, 238, Appendices IV–V
7th, 41, 62, 69, 79, 80, Appendices II–III
Regiments, Turkish:
3rd, 63, 64, 65
6th, 199
44th, 80, 84, 91
141st, 63, 65
142nd, 65, 82
Reinforcements, British, 1, 4, 5, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 36, 38, 88, 93, 100, 105, 106, 121, 128, 129, 131, 133, 135, 139, 140, 145, 148, 149, 151, 157, 159, 160, 161, 163, 164, 165, 169, 171, 172, 173, 176, 177, 179, 190, 191, 228
Reinforcements, Turkish, 1, 5, 6, 10, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 40, 88, 105, 107, 122, 127, 130, 146, 147, 159, 160, 163, 164, 165, 167, 168, 175, 180, 226, 232, 234, 244, 253, 254
Relieving force. See Corps, Tigris
Responsibility, incidence of, 27, 85, 88, 113, 132, 177, 178
Rice, Brig.-Gen. G. H. B., 187, 197, 201, 206, 233
Rifles (see also Gurkhas):
56th, 203, 227, 228, 230, 231, 241, Appendices III–V
59th, 203, 222, 236, 238, Appendices IV–V
104th, 64, 66, Appendices II–III, V
River Section of Artillery, 39, 46
Roberts, Brig.-Gen. H. L., 41, 77
Robertson, General Sir W. (Chief of Imperial General Staff), 152, 162, 163, 164, 166, 173, 178, 193
Roumania, 29
Rowanduz, 127
Ruined Hut, 197, 202, 204, 214
Russian, forces, 30, 31, 33, 107, 109, 118, 127, 128, 130, 139, 147, 153, 164, 167, 179, 180, 199; intelligence service, 32; front in Asia Minor, 89, 128, 179, 199, Appendix I

S

Saddleback, 1, 99
Sahil, 1
Salman Pak, 68, 77, 80, 81, 89
Salonika, Appendix I
Samarrah, 16, 22, 33, 35
Sannah, 185, 186, 214, 244, 252
Sannaiyat, 95, 169, 170, 188, 189, 190, 197, 199, 202, 234, 247, 249
Sappers and Miners, companies of, 116, 134, 172
3rd, 187, 201, Appendices IV–V

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Sappers and Miners companies of—*continued.*
12th, 187, 201, 202, 203, Appendices III–V
13th, 116, 172, 187, 201, Appendices III–V
17th, 41, 50, 60, Appendices II–III
20th, 186, Appendices IV–V
21st, 186, Appendices IV–V
22nd, 48, 51, 52, 62, 66, 68, Appendices II–III
Secretary of State:
India Office, 8, 13, 14, 17, 19, 21, 111, 113, 121. See also London, authorities in
War Office, 162. See also London and War Office
Serbia, 17, Appendix I
Shaibah, 1, 2
Shaikh Saad, 102, 106, 111, 117, 120, 121, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 130, 132, 154, 162, 167, 171, 174, 182, 184, 211, 219, Appendix V
Shammar Arabs, 30
Shatt-al-Arab, 149
Shatt-al-Hai, 94, 95, 97, 103, 112, 124, 131, 137, 142, 143, 144, 149, 153, 154, 156, 157, 158, 168, 174, 175, 182, 191, 198, 200, 205, 226, 232, 234, 246, 247, 248, 253, 254
Shattrah, 124
Shidhaif, 19
Shipping. See Transport, river
Shumran, 117, 145, 156, 157, 174, 175, 180, 181, 182, 185, 188, 191, 200, 226, 244, 248, 253, 254
Signal Service, 60, 116, 203, 204, 220, 224, 225, 229, 230, 231, 232, 234, 240, 241, 242, 243, 245, 246, 250, Appendices II–V
Sikhs:
36th, 191, 201, Appendix V
47th, 203, 222, 236, 237, 238, 239, Appendices IV–V
51st, 203, 227, 230, 231, Appendices III–V
53rd, 203, 226, 228, 230, 231, 241, Appendices III–V
Siloam, pools of, 198, 214, 251, 252
Sinn. See Es Sinn
Sinn Abtar, 191, 195, 196, 199, 205, 206, 207, 211, 221, 222, 232, 233, 234, 237, 245, 246, 248, 249, 250
Sinn canal, 222
Somerset Light Infantry, 1/4th, 191, 203, 222, 233, 234, 237, 238, 239, Appendix V
Staff, combined, 23, 24, 26, 146; improvised, 106, 210. See also General Staff
Stephen, Brig.-Gen. R. C., 197, 203, 224
Subhi Bey, 139, 158
Subsidiary operations, 12, 28, 112, 124
Suk-ash-Shuyukh, 112
Supplies, 39, 42, 74, 102, 111, 124, 126, 131, 137, 138, 145, 146, 149, 151, 154, 156, 157, 162, 164, 165, 167, 170, 173, 176, 179, 182, 194, 200, 204, 243, 247, 249
Suvla, Appendix I
Suwadah, 132, 199
Suwaikiyah, 95, 131, 132, 144, 157, 170, 182, 183, 185, 189, 200, 213
Suwairah, 47, 49
Syria, 3, 31, 35, 45, 78, 180

T

Tabriz, Appendix I
Takrit, 4
Tehran, 128, 199
Thrace, 146
Thorny nullah, 214
Tigris Corps. See Corps, Tigris, and Headquarters, Tigris Corps
Tigris R., 1, 2, 3, 11, 13, 16, 18, 19, 22, 25, 28, 44, 49, 52, 53, 66, 67, 70, 74, 75, 77, 83, 95, 97, 106, 108, 117, 123, 124, 125, 133, 134, 136, 142, 143, 144, 147, 150, 154, 155, 156, 158, 159, 160, 161, 166, 168, 169, 170, 172, 174, 178, 180, 182, 185, 186, 187, 188, 192, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 200, 201, 213, 214, 232, 234, 235, 244, 246, 247, 248, 252, 253, 254, 255
Time factor, 6, 18, 24, 26, 36, 78, 96, 100, 101, 102, 104, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 117, 119, 124, 129, 130, 139, 163, 164, 167, 168, 171, 173, 176, 177, 179, 190, 211, 215, 218,

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Topography, 42, 44, 48, 63, 65, 94, 122, 184, 194, 195, 196, 200
Townshend, Major-Gen. C. V. F., victory at Kurnah, 2; victory at Kut-al-Amarah, 2, 6, 7, 13; halts Aziziyah, 2, 9; opinion as to advance on Baghdad, 9; plan for advance on Baghdad, 10, 20, 42, 43, 44, 45, 48; force under, 19, 29, 38, 39; attacks at Kutniyah, 29; plan for battle of Ctesiphon, 49, 53, 56, 58; battle of Ctesiphon, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 71, 72, 74, 76, 79, 82, 85, 86, 87; decides to retire, 88; retreat to Kut-al-Amarah, 90, 91, 92, 100; siege of Kut-al-Amarah, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 107, 109, 110, 113, 114, 115, 117, 118, 119, 123, 127, 128, 131, 132, 135, 136, 137, 138, 140, 141, 148, 150, 152, 157, 158, 160, 163, 173, 174, 179, 191, 193, 194, 198, 244, 253, 254; information sent by, 103, 104, 114, 115, 117, 123, 125, 127, 135, 142, 143, 144, 181
Transport, land (British), 27, 38, 39, 74, 79, 80, 101, 108, 116, 161, 169, 170, 171, 176, 182, 184, 191, 204, 206, 209, 210, 216, 242, 243, 247, 250
Transport, river (British), 6, 14, 19, 27, 39, 46, 47, 48, 53, 62, 91, 92, 98, 100, 101, 108, 118, 132, 133, 134, 135, 140, 145, 148, 153, 154, 155, 159, 161, 164, 165, 166, 167, 170, 171, 173, 174, 176, 179, 184, 185, 190, 191, 247, Appendix II
Transport (Turkish), 16, 22, 70, 98, 103, 108, 115, 120, 154, 155, 157, 174, 190, 194, 222, 232, 234, 245, 246
Transportation, 6, 10, 31, 36, 98, 106, 179
Turenne, 36
Turkish troops (see also Artillery, Brigade Cavalry, Divisions, Reinforcements, Regiments, Transport), 1, 2, 23, 25, 112, 117, 120, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 129, 130, 131, 132, 142, 143, 149, 152, 153, 154, 160, 162, 164, 165, 168, 176, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 191, 198, 199, 200, 208, 210, 212, 213, 217, 220, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 231, 233, 235, 238, 239, 243, 244, 246, 247, 248, 249, 251, 252, 253, 255, Appendix I; retreat from Kut-al-Amarah, 8; at Ctesiphon, 8, 10, 11, 14, 30, 34, 43, 44, 47, 49, 50, 55, 70, 71, 75, 76, 77, 79, 83, 87; at Zeur, 19, 30, 48; at Bitlis, 30, 31, 32, 33; in Caucasus area, 33, 199; at Baghdad, 30, 32, 34, 35, 146, 200; at Badran, 30, 35; advance to Kut-al-Amarah, 90, 101, 103; besieging Kut-al-Amarah, 104, 106, 107, 109, 114, 119, 120, 122, 125, 131, 139, 145, 148, 157, 158, 162, 173, 176, 181, 188, 192, 198, 199, 200; covering siege, 107, 108, 109, 117, 118, 119, 120, 122, 123, 126, 131, 156, 158, 160, 162, 164, 168, 169, 170, 171, 174, 175, 176, 180, 181, 182, 184, 185, 188, 189, 190, 191, 194, 197, 199, 200, 210, 211, 213, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 231, 243, 246, 247, 248, 249
Twin canals, 252

U

Umm-al-Brahm, 157, 172, 174, 182, 196, 247, 249
Umm-al-Hannah. See Hannah
Umm-al-Tumal, 90, 91, 190
Umm-al-Uruk, 188, 191, 194

V

Van, Appendix I
Verdun, Appendix I
Viceroy of India, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24, 100, 113, 121
Vital Point, 52, 54, 58, 59, 60, 61, 64, 65, 66, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 79, 81, 82, 83, 84
Volunteers, Indian Artillery, 46, Appendices II–V
Von der Goltz, General, 33, 83, 93, 114, 146
Von Moltke, Marshal, 37

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W

Wadi, 123, 133, 167, 184, 187, 190, 194, 198, 201, 211, 213, 244, 247, 249, 252
War Office, 24, 27, 33, 100, 146, 162, 164, 178. See also Chief of Imperial General Staff, General Staff in London, Robertson
Water, drinking, 53, 54, 58, 76, 87, 189, 196, 206, 234, 241, 245, 247
Water redoubt, 67, 68, 79, 80, 81
Weather, 2, 42, 78, 110, 115, 117, 123, 126, 129, 134, 135, 136, 142, 147, 149, 153, 159, 171, 176, 193, 229, 234
Wellington, 37
West ridge, 222, 233, 237
Western Powers, 17, 28
Wireless stations, 51, 62, 128
Wounded. See Casualties

Y

Yesi, 43, 53, 54, 55, 62
Younghusband, Major-Gen. Sir G., 102, 105, 116, 119, 120, 124, 125, 126, 132, 134, 186, 187, 196, 201, 243, 244
Ypres, Appendix I

Z

Zeur, 19, 30, 41, 44, 47, 48

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